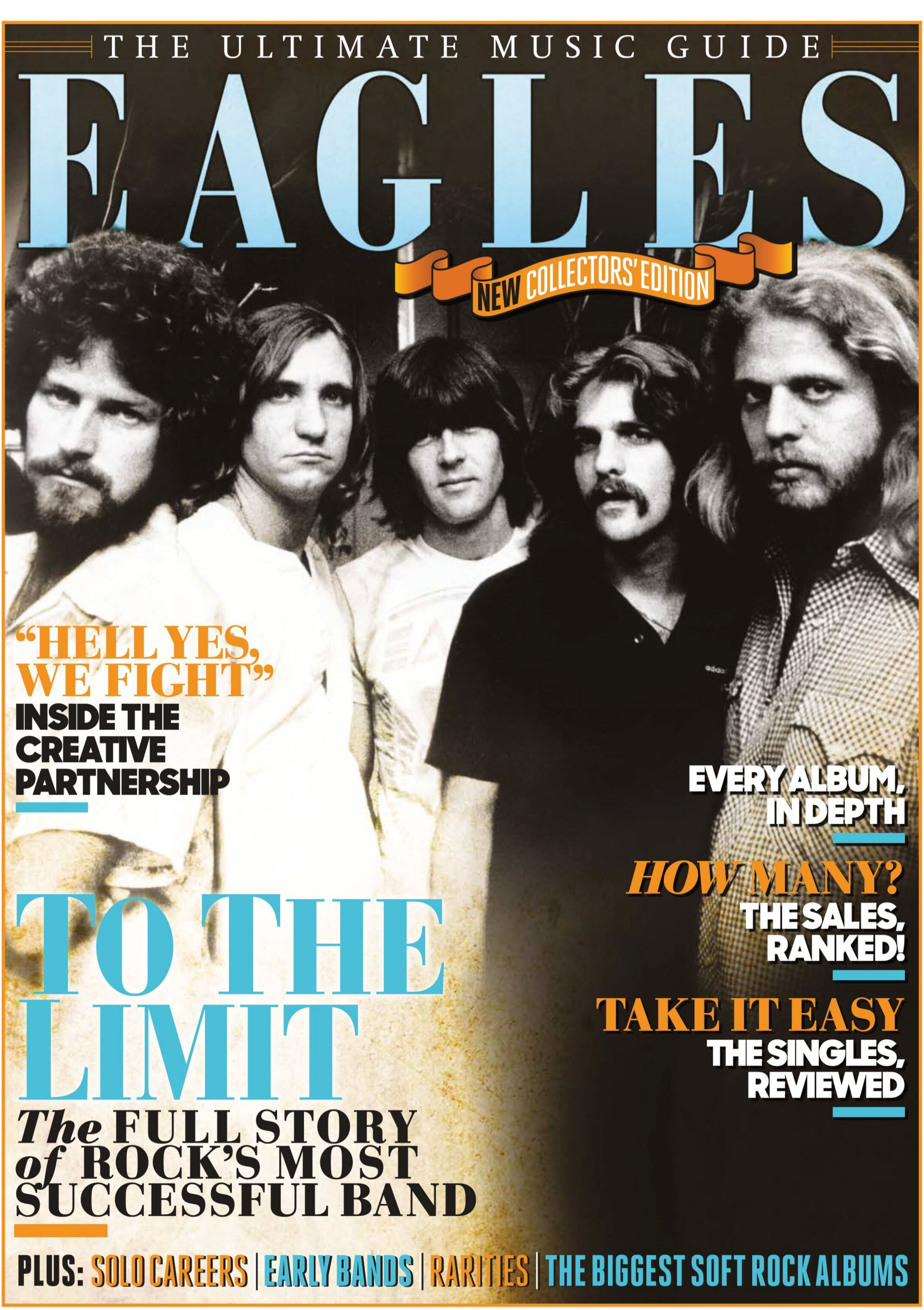
THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

EAGLES

NEW COLLECTORS' EDITION



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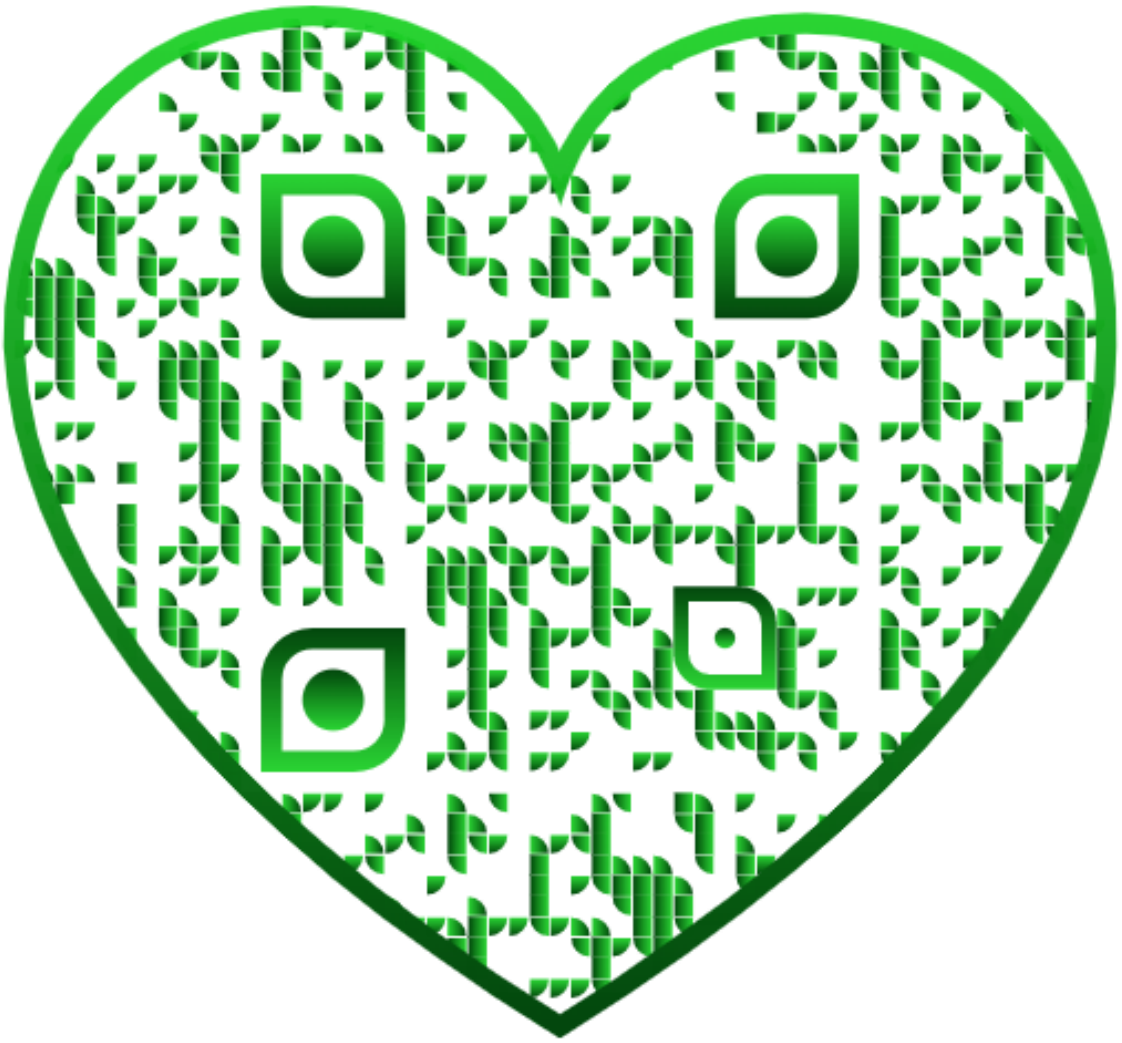

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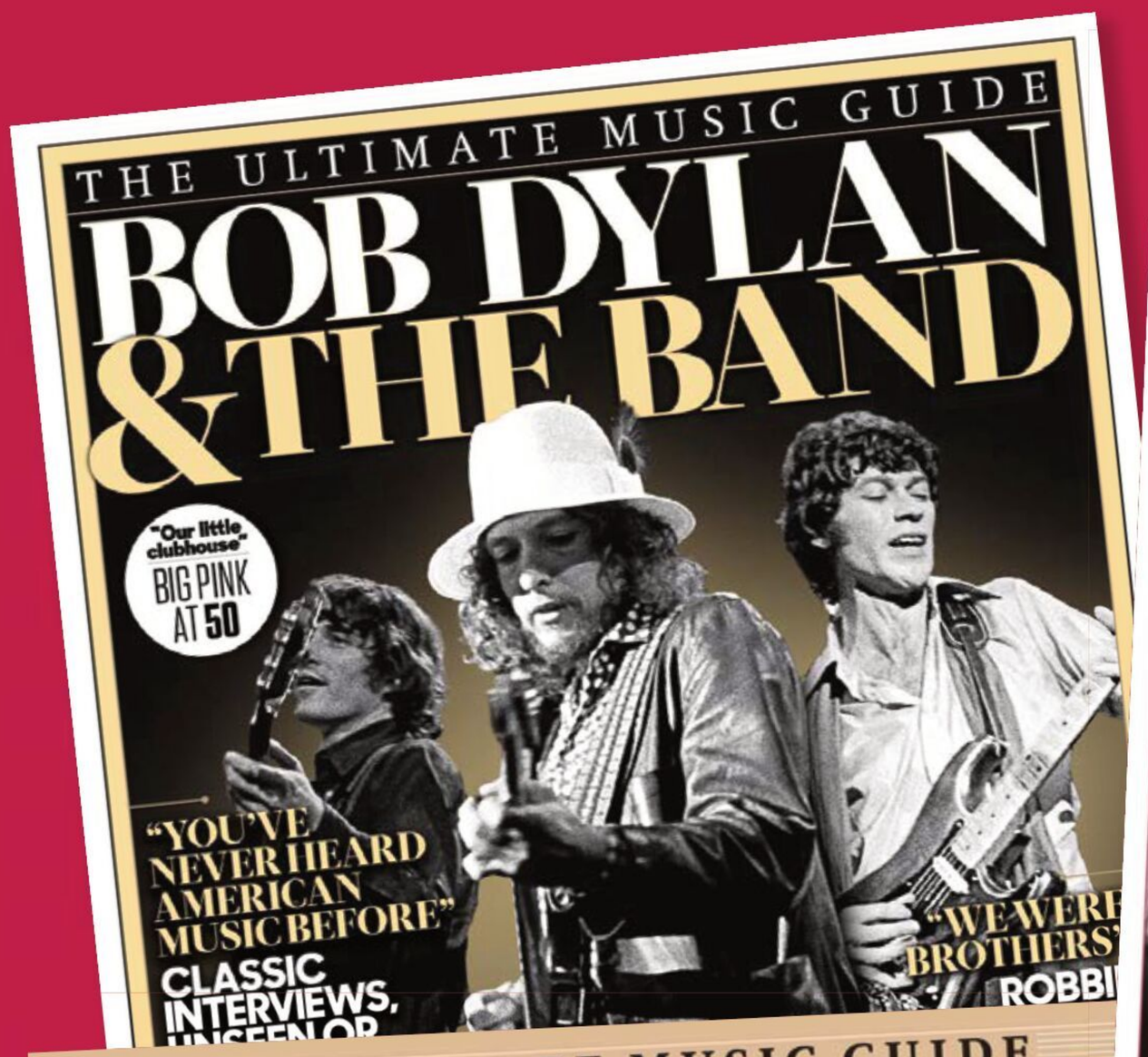

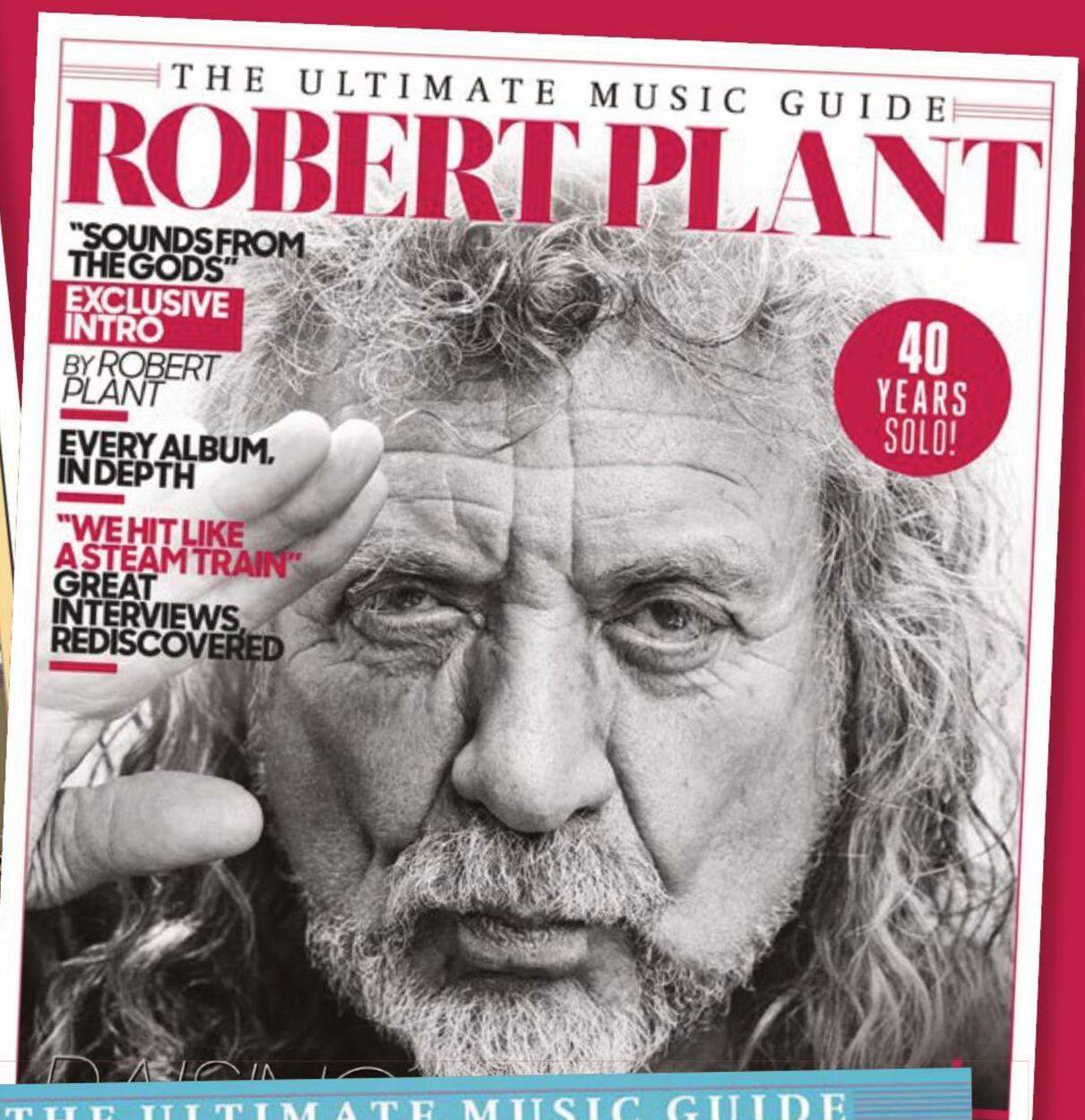

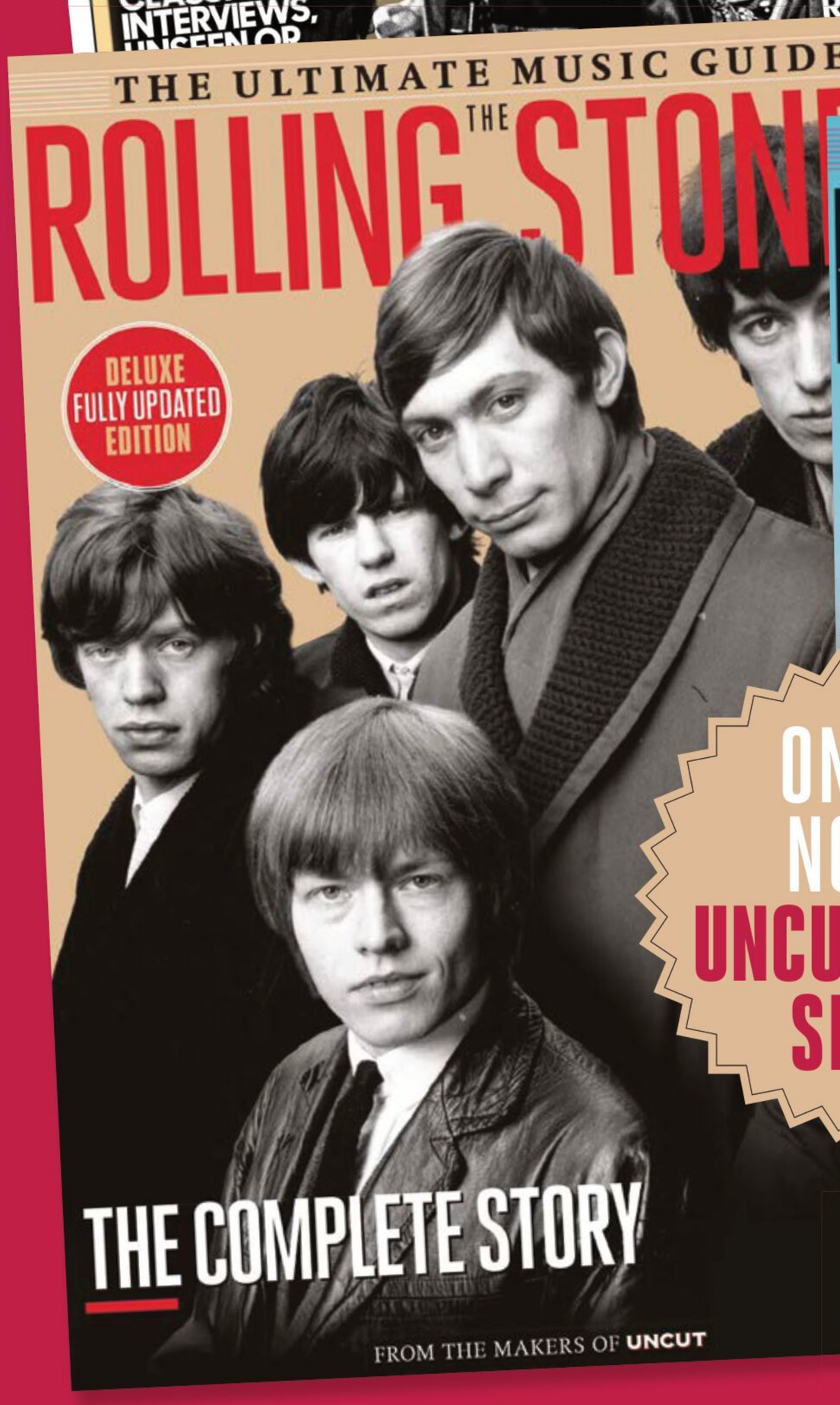

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EAGLES INTRO

"BE WHAT YOU WANT"

ONE thing you can be pretty sure the Eagles never did was to take it easy. Though already veterans of several countrywide late-1960s bands from the tail-end of the country rock boom, by the time the original lineup came together at Doug Weston's Troubadour Club in Los Angeles, they weren't so much disheartened by what had gone before, more primed and ready to make their next move.

In the band's circle were other promising artists. Linda Ronstadt, with whom they first performed together. John David Souther, who was in a band with Frey. And Jackson Browne, who, like Souther, contributed material to the new group. "Everyone was coming to California, and in the end that was what they were writing about," Browne told *Uncut* in just one of the eye-opening archive interviews you'll find inside this latest *Ultimate Music Guide*. "That projected dream of what freedom could be. Vacate your assigned positions in life and be what you fucking want."

Now in the right place at the right time, the Eagles seized their moment. Ambitious musically as well as personally, they were driven by what some called perfectionism, but might more correctly be identified as a desire to maximise their potential. Over their legendary run of albums in the 1970s – reviewed in depth on the following pages – the band moved from definitively mellow recordings with contributions from each member, through concept albums, and increasingly to a completely unique and widescreen take on the state of their era. Along the way, they touched on ecology, paranoid relationships, hard rock and disco.

As it had been for Crosby, Stills and Nash, close harmony served both as a description of the band's vocal style, and an ironic comment on the state of relations within the group. As you'll read, what began as a group perceived as based around the talents of its two most experienced members – Bernie Leadon, once a Flying Burrito Brother; Randy Meisner, late of Poco – quickly came to turn on the fortunes of the youngest members: Don Henley and Glenn Frey.

The person who got the point quicker than anyone was Irving Azoff, who became the Eagles' manager/champion. The other players were, as he saw it, "sidemen", and this became a governing principle for the band. Other musicians might contribute. Joe Walsh brought a toughness to their sound and one of their greatest songs, "Pretty Maids All In A Row". Guitarist Don Felder didn't only mesh well with Walsh, he also wrote the chord progression that the band called "Mexican Reggae" and which we know as "Hotel California". Still, no-one pretended that this was a democracy.

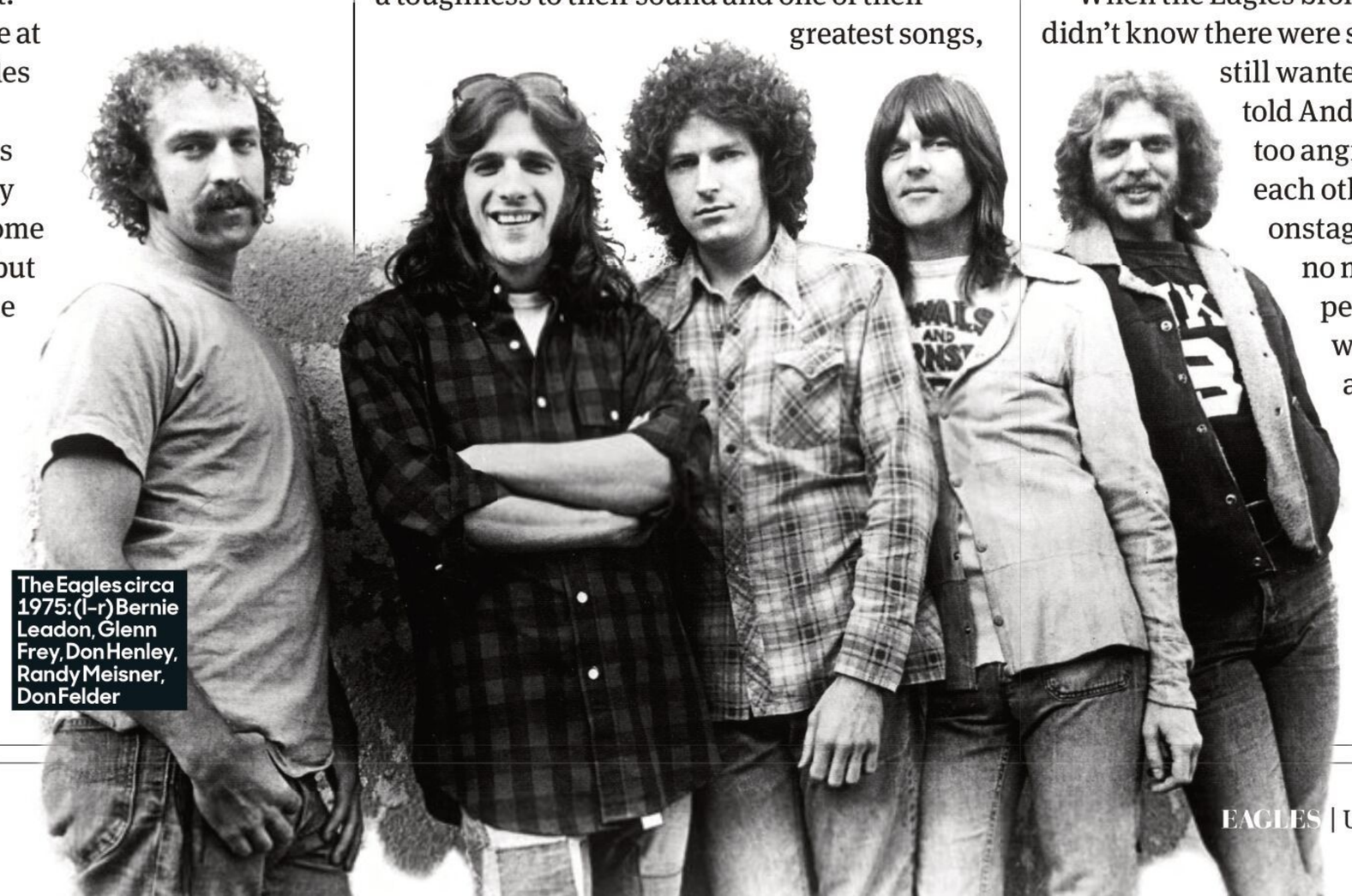
THE fact that the Eagles are still playing in 2022 is down to the strength of music made on that run of 1970s albums, and to Azoff's belief in the band long after it had ceased to exist. After a decade watching them do their own thing separately, Azoff put together the *Common Thread* tribute album in which country artists performed Eagles songs. He held a fabled lunch meeting at which he persuaded the warring factions to bury the hatchet, and reform.

In his most recent meeting with *Uncut*, the band's driving force, Don Henley, was circumspect on many aspects of the Eagles' career – but still couldn't quite get over that decision to reform, and just how much their music still means.

"When the Eagles broke up for 14 years, we didn't know there were so many people who still wanted to see us play," Don told Andy Gill. "We were just too angry and fed up with each other: 'I'm not getting onstage with that guy again, no matter how many people want to see us!' But when we started touring again, we were just flabbergasted at how many people were turning up."

Enjoy the magazine, and the shows if you're going. And take it easy.

JOHN ROBINSON, EDITOR



The Eagles circa 1975: (l-r) Bernie Leadon, Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Randy Meisner, Don Felder

CONTENTS

3 INTRODUCTION
Take it easy with a disparate group of ambitious musicians that found themselves in the right place at the right time

6 "It was quite a scene..."
INTERVIEW A new sound comes together at LA's Troubadour club

12 EAGLES
REVIEW Four country rock journeymen arrive Out West to chase the American Dream

16 "We wanted it all. Why not?"
INTERVIEW The Eagles head to London in a wintry UK to capture the "sunshine sounds of California"

24 DESPERADO
REVIEW An early dive into the concept album blurs the lines between slinging guns and guitars

28 "We were quite taken with the idea of being outlaws"
INTERVIEW 1973: the "benevolent dictatorship" stands on the cusp of superstardom

34 "Things just had to happen"
INTERVIEW The band meet the press in London. To be discussed: glam rock, Glyn Johns and Linda Ronstadt

40 ON THE BORDER
REVIEW Can the Eagles rock? They come home to roost in the US and win over hearts with a ballad

44 "California is shaking like an angry child..."
INTERVIEW The West Coast country rock scene gets a gleaming makeover for the mid-'70s

50 ONE OF THESE NIGHTS
REVIEW The Eagles' global breakthrough in dark political times

54 "A certain western charisma"
INTERVIEW Mellow sounds from a highly strung bunch as the band get ready for greatness

60 THEIR GREATEST HITS (1971-1975)
REVIEW Reputedly against their wishes, the release of the best-selling compilation of all time!

64 HOTEL CALIFORNIA
REVIEW Welcome to the American Nightmare, dressed up in dream-like melodies

68 "It's about the demise of the '60s and decadence in the '70s"
INTERVIEW The Eagles explore their satirical side

76 THE LONG RUN
REVIEW The breakup looms... foul moods, creative exhaustion and internal strife

80 EAGLES LIVE
REVIEW Covering the cracks, the band's tour-spanning live doc hides signs of disintegration

84 The Eagles' Singles
INTERVIEW From fast living and haunted hotels to love affairs gone bad, all the 45s assessed

90 HELL FREEZES OVER
REVIEW The band end their "14-year vacation" for an MTV special, live/studio album and tour

94 LONG ROAD OUT OF EDEN
REVIEW The seventh album tackles politics, media and the band's own turbulent history

98 GLENN FREY SOLO
REVIEW A lead Eagle flies solo: hits and flops ensue

102 DON HENLEY SOLO
REVIEW The singing drummer soars above the others by mining a rich seam of discontent

106 "I've reached a point where I want to go back to my roots"
INTERVIEW Henley reflects on the heroes and villains in his story so far

112 JOE WALSH SOLO
REVIEW Before and after the Eagles... the rocky ups and downs of the hard-living guitarist and songwriter

116 LIVE & COMPS
REVIEW World-beating collections and fine live sets

118 MISCELLANY
REVIEW Writers and co-writers, pre-Eagles outfits, the band on vinyl and more

122 STOP ME
REVIEW LA, 1975: Bud Scoppa meets Don Henley and Glenn Frey to learn about the band's "theory of creative tension"

GEORGE PIMENTEL/GETTY IMAGES

The Eagles at Sundance, Park City, Utah, January 2013: (l-r) Timothy B Schmit, Don Henley, Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh

Flying in the face of punk: the Eagles live in the UK, 1977: (l-r) Randy Meisner, Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Don Felder and Joe Walsh

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A CALDECOTT MUSIC GROUP COMPANY

EDITOR JOHN ROBINSON (*JOHN.ROBINSON@UNCUT.CO.UK*)
WHOSE FAVOURITE EAGLES SONG IS *ALREADY GONE*
UNCUT EDITOR MICHAEL BONNER
JOURNEY OF THE SORCERER
ART EDITOR MARC JONES *DESPERADO*
SENIOR DESIGNER MICHAEL CHAPMAN
TEQUILA SUNRISE
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT MARK BEAUMONT
TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT
PRODUCTION EDITOR MICK MEIKLEHAM
HOTEL CALIFORNIA
SENIOR SUB EDITOR MIKE JOHNSON
ONE OF THESE NIGHTS
PICTURE EDITOR PHIL KING
THE DISCO STRANGLER
THANKS THIS ISSUE: LORA FINDLAY, JOHNNY SHARP
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CLIENT SERVICES

SENIOR MANAGER, COMMERCIAL & PARNERSHIPS
PAUL WARD
ADVERTISE@UNCUT.CO.UK
SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER
CHARLOTTE WORT

NME NETWORKS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER MENG RU KUOK
CHIEF OPERATING AND COMMERCIALOFFICER
HOLLY BISHOP
AVP, NORTH AMERICA LEAD, COMMERCIAL & PARTNERSHIPS JESSE SMITH
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR ILIYAS ONG
ART DIRECTOR SIMON FREEBOROUGH
PROJECT MANAGER SOFIANA RAMLI
REGIONAL EDITOR (APAC) KAREN GWEE
SENIOR MANAGER, OPERATIONS & EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AMY FLETCHER
CONTENT PRODUCTION ASSOCIATE
BILLY CHUA

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Eagles nest: the Troubadour circa 1971

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"IT WAS QUITE A SCENE..."

Grab a seat at the **TROUBADOUR**. You might catch The Stone Poneys or a set by Longbranch Pennywhistle. You could even see David Crosby playing chess. Whichever, a new but familiar soundtrack is coming together. It's a highly melodic fusion of folk, country and rock – the building blocks of the Eagles. "Those guys felt comfortable there," one eyewitness tells Graeme Thomson. "The royalty of the bar."

Troub grit: the Eagles' first lineup of Frey, Meisner, Henley and Leadon, which formed around the venue

UNCUT APRIL 2017

AT times during the 1960s and early '70s, the wellspring of creativity emanating from Doug Weston's Troubadour club appeared unstoppable; music seemed to flow unceasingly. One night in 1970, long after Jo Mama, a local band formed by guitarist Danny Kortchmar, had finished their set and the audience had departed, the Troubadour served up a private encore.

"Joni Mitchell was there," says Kortchmar. "We were all pals. She said, 'Oh, Kootch, let me play you my new song.' She got on stage, sat down at the piano, and played 'The Last Time I Saw Richard'. I remember Dan Hicks sitting way at the back by himself, listening to this, agog. We all were. Stuff like that would happen all the time at the Troubadour. People would exchange ideas, or showcase new material. It was the centre of a beautiful, supportive community."

A former Jaguar showroom situated at 9081 Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, for a decade the 350-capacity club punched well above its weight. It the place where Roger McGuinn first connected with his fellow Byrds; the ensemble premiered "Mr Tambourine Man" there, inventing folk-rock in the process. Tim Buckley, Jackson Browne and Tom Waits first emerged at the club's legendary Monday-night Hootenanny. Carole King debuted "You've Got A Friend" there. The club acted as midwife to the Eagles, and facilitated the American breakthrough of Cat Stevens and Elton John. Classic live albums by Van Morrison and Donny Hathaway were recorded there.

"It was a catalyst for many different types of music: folk, blues, jazz, singer-songwriters," says McGuinn. "The Troubadour played a really big part in my life, and that of many other musicians."

"If you were a new artist and there was a chance to play the Troub it was an amazing opportunity, as there was a 'Good Housekeeping' seal of approval," says Ron Stone, a former senior member of David Geffen and Elliot Roberts' management company. "You had arrived."

The Troubadour wasn't merely a launch pad for musicians. For those who worked, performed and socialised there, it represented an entire way of life. "It had a mission in terms of the music it was presenting, and the whole atmosphere around the club," says Ursula Britton, Doug Weston's partner in running the Troubadour during its prime. "We were growing up, becoming adults. With the Troubadour, we all had a place to go to work out those issues for ourselves, in the company of people who felt the same way."

A FLAMBOYANT figure named after Douglas Fairbanks, Doug Weston was born into a wealthy New York family on December 13, 1926. Six feet six inches tall by his early teens, he grew into a brash, eccentric and somewhat troubled man. For Ron Stone, he had "the bedside manner of Attila The Hun". For Britton he was a loveable "dictator-king", capable of great generosity, shocking excesses and bouts of mania. "Doug was very misunderstood by all of us," says Richard Davis, who started working – and sleeping – at the Troubadour in 1961, and later managed Buffalo Springfield, who played their debut show at the club in 1966. "He was a closeted gay man. We all knew, but he certainly never spoke about it or wanted anyone to talk about it."

Weston had moved west in the mid-'50s, graduating in English at Cal State University before becoming assistant manager of the Apollo Theatre in Hollywood. In 1957 he opened a 65-seat coffeehouse at the Coronet theatre on La Cienega Boulevard. Shortly afterwards, he moved to roomier premises on Santa Monica Boulevard. "The Troubadour was a big white icebox," says Davis. "It had recently been a Jaguar garage. There was a dealership at the front and a garage at the back where the showroom was. We painted it different shades of mustard. Initially, it was more a cabaret theatre. We had productions of Ionesco and Ray Bradbury plays during the early days."

From the street, the door opened into a dark, high-ceilinged performance room. The stage was at the back wall, from which tables and chairs fanned out, with a raised seating area facing the stage. At the rear was a tiny bar and kitchen. Upstairs was a balcony with theatre seats, cramped, dowdy dressing rooms and a rudimentary lighting booth. "That was a dangerous room," says Davis, who ran the lights until 1964. "Doug had cobbled together a lighting system out of some old, leftover parts from a Chinese vaudeville theatre. It was loose electricity."

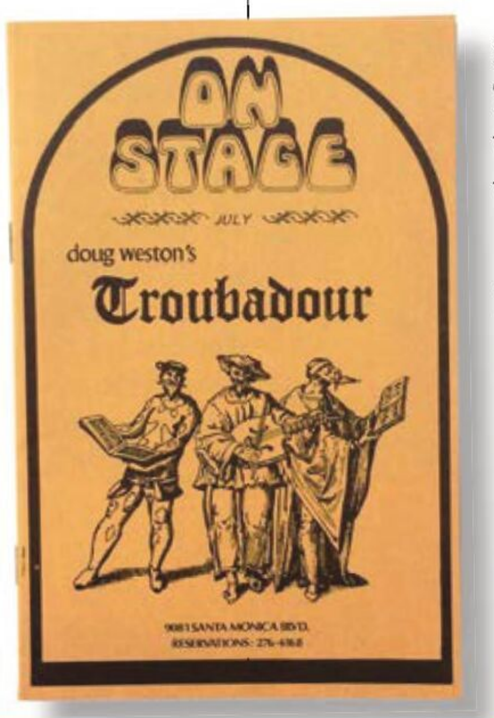
By the early 1960s, the Troubadour was well established, primarily due to Weston riding the

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

folk boom. A crucial part of its appeal was the establishment of Hoot nights, which began in December 1961 under the impetus of Richard Davis and folk musician Randy Boone, who later appeared in TV show *Bonanza*. "One night we went to a Hootenanny at another coffee house, and Randy thought it would be a good idea to try that at the Troubadour, which was dark on Monday nights. We sold tickets at the door, people could come in and get a free drink if they wanted to play."

Over the coming decade, Monday open-mic nights at the Troubadour became both an astonishingly productive proving ground for new talent and a valuable shop window. The sign outside read: "Bring your axe or whatever you swing with". The first act to score were the New Christy Minstrels, a folk ensemble which at various times included Gene Clark, Jerry Yester and Barry McGuire. After appearing on *The Andy Williams Show*, they went from playing to 10 people at the Troubadour to being oversold every night.

One early MC, or "Hootmaster", was Michael Nesmith, who simply failed to turn up one night after joining The Monkees. Singer-songwriter Judy Henske made initial strides there. So did Roger McGuinn. "Doug Weston was very kind," says McGuinn. "Sometimes I didn't have money, and he'd give me a cheeseburger or a couple of beers and let me hang out there during the daytime."



"Doug Weston would give me a cheeseburger and let me hang out at the Troubadour"
ROGER McGUINN

It was always available to people as a place to play. You could walk in and find somebody jamming on guitar or banjo, just sitting around the tables." "It was a scene of Doug's making," says Davis. "He allowed the Troubadour to be a focus for it. The members of the in-crowd never paid for a ticket. Anyone who was part of that group was welcome."

"It was a place we could sneak into," says David Crosby, another musician who gravitated to Monday's open-mic nights. "We'd spend a lot of time there. It was like a clubhouse where people could just hang out and meet like-minded people."

Without access to such a nurturing environment, The Byrds might never have existed. "I was playing solo there, doing Beatle-ised folk music, and the audience wasn't enjoying it," says McGuinn. "The only person who liked it was Gene Clark. He came and said, 'Hey, I get what you're doing. Let's write some songs and see what happens.' Then, Gene and I were sitting in the front room of the Troubadour writing songs, and David Crosby came in and started singing harmonies with us." As McGuinn recalls it, The Byrds premiered their version of "Mr Tambourine Man" at the club in 1965.

By this time, the club had found its niche in a crowded market. "The Troubadour had a reputation that was based around acoustic music, whereas the Whisky A Go Go was attracting The Doors and Jefferson Airplane," says Ron Stone. "The Troubadour had tables and chairs, and not a high-powered sound system. It was a relatively small stage. So acoustic music was appropriate. The Whisky had a high stage, no seats, loud music. Different cultures for different rooms."

It became the premier destination for aspiring singer-songwriters, with Monday nights as the hub. The prime spots were between 10pm and midnight, and much jockeying went on for position. Tim Buckley made one of his first notable appearances there, and enchanted everyone. "He was so great," says Nurit Wilde, a photographer who ran the lights between 1966 and 1968. "And such a nice guy." The teenage Jackson Browne played the Hoots, sang with The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and blagged free hamburgers. Linda Ronstadt performed with The Stone Poneys, who supported Odetta.

Phil Ochs, David Blue, Penny Nichols and countless other less celebrated artists passed through the doors. They recognised a spiritual home. The Troubadour was small enough to see, be seen – and, crucially, be heard. "It was a listening room," says Ron Stone. "It had an intimacy that was valuable. If you were a singer-songwriter and lyrics were important, that was the best environment you could possibly have."

More than just a crucible for embryonic sensitive songwriters, the Troubadour had a uniquely eclectic booking policy. "I saw Carmen McRae there, the great jazz singer, who absolutely riveted the audience," says Kortchmar. "She did 'Here, There And Everywhere' slow and deep, just beautiful. I saw Donny Hathaway the night he recorded his live album. It was a really small club, so you could get right up and watch these great musicians. And you could get in! I don't remember buying tickets in advance, ever. You'd just go and get in, five or six bucks on the door, to see some of the greatest acts you could ever imagine."

Muddy Waters' 10-night residency in April 1966 is recalled with awe, while Nina Simone was an occasional and imperious presence. "I was very excited when she was booked," says Nurit Wilde. "But she wouldn't talk to me. I had to rehearse the lights with her, and her husband was the go-between. At the end of her run he gave me ➤

My gaff, my rules: Doug Weston (right) with a punter at the Troub, early 1970s

"IT WAS LIKE OUR CHURCH"

Don Henley on the Troubadour in the 1970s and in the 21st century...

"IT'S a mere shadow now... its glory days are over. It's still there, but they've remodelled the front of it, so it doesn't look the same any more on the outside; and strange groups play there now. It's not the warm scene of camaraderie it once was. It was a real place of foment for a while, a melting pot; we would all gather there.

"It was like our church: singer-songwriters would mingle and talk about songwriting and see the acts that were playing inside. You'd meet and hang out in the bar, have a few drinks, then go in and watch the acts, which were all in the same genre, singer-songwriter stuff. Monday night was 'Hoot night', from the old folk word 'hootenanny'. It was a showcase for new groups. My group Shiloh played a Hoot night, and that's where JD Souther and Glenn Frey saw us play, and took notice of me. It turned out we were signed to the same label, Amos, that Kenny Rogers had signed us to. JD and Glenn were a duo on that same label [*Longbranch Pennywhistle*], and nothing was working out for any of us very well. So JD went solo, Glenn and I paired off, and the rest of my guys went to play for Linda Ronstadt. But the Troubadour was the centre of the universe back then; it's not so much, any more."

BRAD ELTERMAN/FILMMAGIC, HARMONY GERBER/GETTY IMAGES

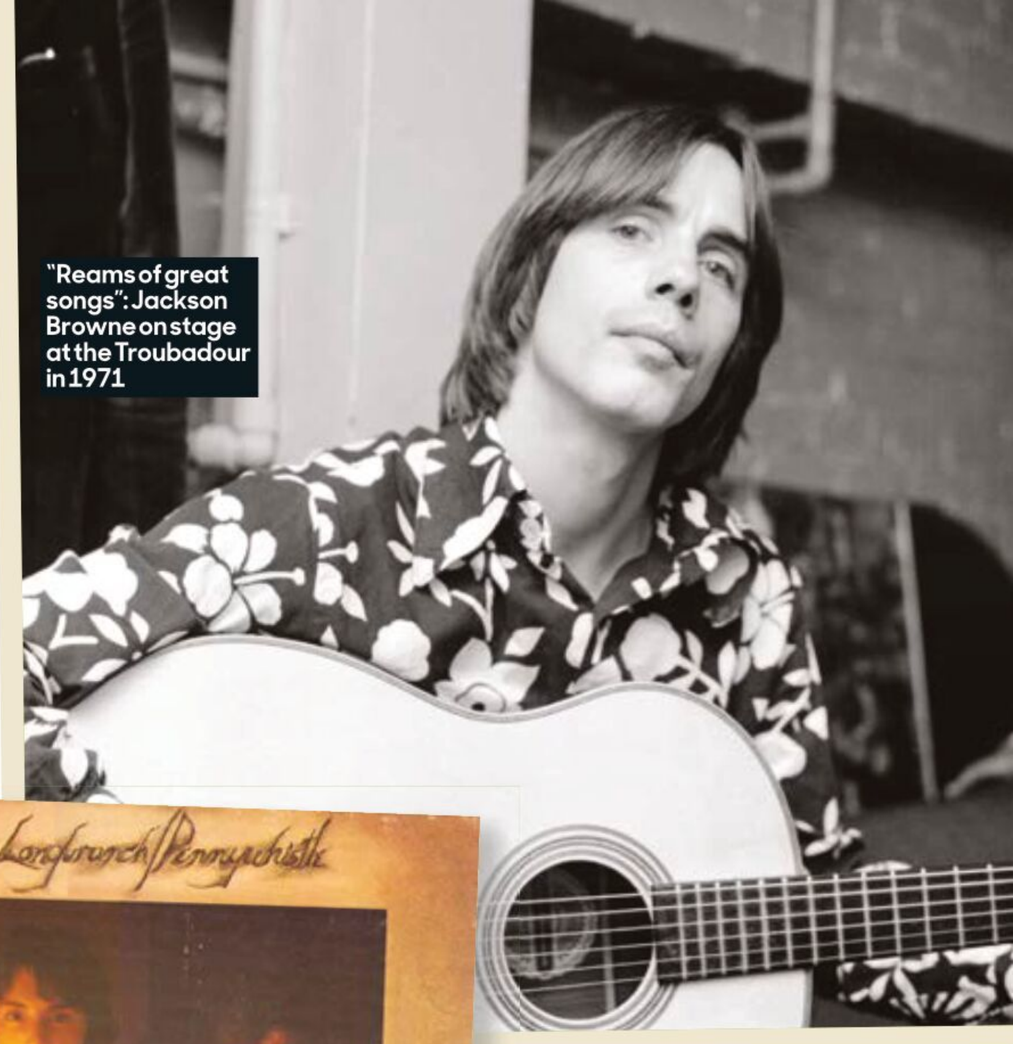
a bottle of champagne and a $200 bonus, but she never even acknowledged my existence."

DOUG WESTON struggled through the Summer Of Love. The Troubadour attracted a slightly older college crowd, in contrast to the young hippies who thronged the Strip. Weston's attempts to harness flower power for commercial gain by opening a "psychedelicatessen" – the Rainbow Café on Fairfax Avenue – ended in swift, expensive failure.

Fortunately, the Troubadour was entering its golden age. At the end of 1967, it was granted a liquor licence – previously it could serve only beer and wine. Weston duly built a larger bar at the front of the club, in an area which had previously been a McCabe's guitar store and, latterly, a hippy gift shop. "The bar really gave the scene a focus," says Richard Davis. "It gave people a place to be without being in the middle of the room competing with the acts and the espresso machine. By then a lot of people who had been playing for pennies were in successful groups and would hang out there. There was regular crowd any night, and on Monday night it was there in spades."

"A lot of them never even came into the club," says Nurit Wilde. "They just stayed in the bar." Janis Joplin would waltz in and fall out. She visited the bar the night before she died. The Doors had offices nearby, and Jim Morrison would often drop by. "There was a train that used to roll down the centre of Santa Monica Boulevard, and Jim and I jumped on it one night," says Davis. "We rode it to Beverly Hills and walked back." In March 1969, Morrison was thrown out after engaging in what Britton describes only as "lewd behaviour".

By the late 1960s, JD Souther, Jackson Browne, Glenn Frey, Linda Ronstadt and Don Henley topped the bar hierarchy. "There were musicians and artists who definitely felt it was their clubhouse," says Stone. "There was a clique of young singer-songwriters who all hung around there." Frey and Souther were in Longbranch Pennywhistle; Souther was also dating Linda Ronstadt. Henley had newly arrived from Texas. Browne was writing reams of great songs. Their various musical endeavours were heading towards a significant fusion of country, folk and rock. They would eventually all work and write together, largely thanks to the Troubadour connection. "They were the main players," says Kortchmar. "It was quite a scene. Those guys felt comfortable there, as the royalty of the bar. They were all trying to outdo each other. Sitting at the bar, brooding, trying to be a Charles Bukowski."


"Reams of great songs": Jackson Browne on stage at the Troubadour in 1971

The Troubadour was at the centre of a wider scene. Next door was Dan Tana's Italian restaurant, which would stay open late for performers. It was a refuelling stop in more ways than one. "There was a lot of coke there, even at the tables sometimes," says Nurit Wilde. "You had your dinner and a nice snort of coke – it was like dessert. Then you'd head back to the club." Ron Stone ran the Great Linoleum Clothing Experiment nearby, and would open late to catch people en route to and from the club. After being fired from The Byrds in 1967, David Crosby would often stop in to the boutique to play chess and smoke a joint. After closing time, many of the staff would head for Norm's all-night restaurant, to nurse a 10 cent coffee until dawn, or repair to rented houses in nearby Laurel Canyon to talk, drink, smoke and play all night.

The staff were as colourful as the punters. The general manager was a man known only as Gat, who on opening nights wore an immaculate three-piece suit with a gold watch fob. "He looked like a pirate, with his moustache and long hair," says Wilde. "He ran the place. He was phenomenal." Lighting engineer Michael Sheer strode around in a cape. Head waitress Raina, meanwhile, was queen of the bar. "You tried to curry her favour as she was a VIP there," says Kortchmar. Staff were fired not for stealing, which was acceptable, but for stealing too much. When Weston did grace the stage, he would recite TS Eliot's "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock".

On the floor, the Troubadour attracted a fearsomely well-informed audience. "It was a very tough crowd," says McGuinn. "I remember seeing Jackson Browne on stage, shaking his head, saying, 'Man, and they think New York is a tough place to play!' A jury of your peers. Everybody in the audience was probably better than you." "They knew what they liked," says Wilde. "But I don't think they were demanding, and they weren't rude. They came to listen."

Among their number were established impresarios such as Frank Zappa's manager, Herb Cohen, as well as moguls-in-the- making like David Geffen, Elliot Roberts and Irving Azoff, who between them would produce, manage and release records by almost the entire Troubadour talent pool. By 1970 the club had a reputation as a place where careers could be made. The artists who defined the scene were breaking into the mainstream. James Taylor became a household name in early 1970 with *Sweet Baby James* and "Fire And Rain". On Thanksgiving week 1970, Carole King played her first ever solo shows at the Troubadour, supporting Taylor. "That encouraged Carole to go out on her own," says Kortchmar. "That was the start of the recognition of her talent." Linda Ronstadt had a hit with "Long, Long Time". Kris Kristofferson supported her at the Troubadour and, as he wryly reflected, "never had to work a job again" after a rave review in *The LA Times*. Joni Mitchell – who played her first LA shows at the club in 1968 – released her third LP, the epochal *Ladies Of The Canyon*. Jackson Browne was an in-demand songwriter with growing reputation as a performer.

RICHARD MCCAFFREY/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

COMEDY CENTRAL

DOUG WESTON'S adventurous streak extended to his funny bone. The Troubadour had a reputation for booking emerging and often controversial comic talent that other clubs were reluctant to hire, including Richard Pryor, George Carlin and Lord Buckley. Weston gave Lenny Bruce a platform when the comic was facing charges for obscenity and possession of narcotics. He was arrested the day after his Troub show on October 22, 1962, charged with violating California's obscenity law for uttering the word "schmuck". The case ended the following year in a mistrial. Stoner duo Cheech & Chong were discovered in 1970 by Lou Adler during a Hoot night, and Steve Martin was a regular in the glory days. He arrived as a banjo player and left as a comic star. Opening for The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, the Troub crowd proved a perfect testing ground for his non-linear comedy, while trains that ran past the club along Santa Monica Blvd became part of his act. He had a typically droll take on it all. "The Mecca was the Troubadour," he said. "Even though there was a club called the Mecca."

Éminence grise: Banjo player turned comic star Steve Martin

Scene and herd: John Lennon and Alice Cooper celebrate Thanksgiving at the Troub, November 1973

Longbranch Pennywhistle folded in 1971 and from its ashes the Eagles formed. It is almost inconceivable to think they would have done so without the Troubadour. "At that time, JD and Jackson were part of the band, playing rhythm guitar," says Ron Stone. "They all lived, wrote and hung out together, and they all wanted to be in the band. When the Eagles started we actually rented the Troubadour in the afternoon for rehearsals."

A little-known British act made an appearance at the Troubadour in August that year. Elton John arrived as a mystery – "I called him 'John who?'," says Ursula Britton – and left six nights later as a star. "It was like everything I'd been waiting for suddenly happened," John said. "I could tell it was a magical night from the moment I stepped on stage."

For a brief period, the Troubadour offered the perfect synthesis of artistic credibility, commercial opportunity and peer approval. "It was the number-one place to play in LA," says Kortchmar. "To pass through the Troubadour was the way you got started."

"You graduated from the Troubadour," agrees Ron Stone. "The [*next*] place to play in that milieu was the Dorothy Chandler Music Pavilion downtown. That was where Jackson opened for Laura Nyro in December 1970. That was the moment of arrival, the peak place for this rarefied music that emanated from the Troubadour. From there the next step up was the Greek Theatre. After that, you were a star."

WITH star-making came problems. By the summer of 1971, Carole King's *Tapestry* had taken over the world mere months after her Troubadour debut. Britton felt the scene at the club was increasingly "decadent". Hoot nights had become hard-nosed. The place was flooded with executives, hustlers, groupies – everyone seemed to be either posing or on the make. "It [*started as*] a very sanguine, peaceful scene," says Kortchmar. "But when the money got big, so did the egos. 'People love us! Wow! Money, fame!' Well, that changes everything."

Tom Waits was the last artist of renown to make his mark via the club. Travelling to the Monday night Hoots from San Diego, he was spotted by Herb Cohen and signed to Geffen's Asylum label in 1972. But the idyll was over. Many of the problems were of Weston's own making, not least his insistence on tying artists to punitive contracts which compelled them to return to the club for desultory fees, even after they became famous. "It was repressive, involuntary servitude," says Ron Stone. "If you had no success, or modest success, you did your penance for bad money. If you became a big artist and he had you by the balls, you had to negotiate an arrangement. Occasionally we had to take matters into our own hands."

Joni Mitchell, whom Stone managed in tandem with Elliot Roberts, had signed one of Weston's notorious contracts early on. "The first time Joni played there, it was wonderful for her," says Stone. "I would say the second time she was doing them a tremendous favour." As Stone explains, there never was a third time. "The contracts were in a filing cabinet at the Troubadour, so Elliot and I executed a plan. We went to the club, and I sat with Doug at the bar and drank for an hour or two, while Elliot allegedly went up to Doug's office, found Joni's contract in his file and – made it disappear! The next time we got into a confrontation about her playing a different venue in LA, Doug got upset and started screaming that we had a contract. Elliot said, 'If you have a contract you should show it to us, and we will abide by it.' We never heard from him again on the issue. Doug's policy was considered unfair, and people rebelled against it."

"I could tell it would be a magical night from the moment I stepped on stage"
ELTON JOHN

The ultimate rebellion was the opening of the Roxy on Sunset Strip in September 1973. Housed in a former strip club, it was co-owned by Geffen, Roberts, Carole King's label boss and producer Lou Adler, and the proprietor of the Whisky, Elmer Valentine. Virtually the entire power base of the local music scene had conspired against Weston. "The Roxy was specifically designed to put the Troubadour out of business," says Richard Davis. "It could seat about 150 more people, and it was much more professionally run. They swept up the incoming talent that knew better than to sign Doug's stringent option deals. When the Roxy opened, the Troubadour's days were numbered." The prevailing mood began to darken. The most notable event of 1974 was when John Lennon and Harry Nilsson were thrown out of the club for drunkenly heckling the Smothers Bros. As the drugs hardened, a kind of dread enveloped the Hollywood scene. The Troubadour's fate ran a parallel course. In 1975 the club briefly closed, mired in drugs, mismanagement and debt. The first booking for the reopening was Tim Buckley, who died of an overdose days before the show.

Weston sank into cocaine addiction, and became estranged from the club in the 1980s, when it became a pay-to-play venue for glam metal bands. Guns N' Roses cut their teeth there in 1986 (and returned to play their first reunion show there in April 2016). Though the wheels kept turning, the Troubadour after Weston's own decline became just another venue.

"Doug was responsible for what happened at the Troubadour and what happened in the music business because of it," says Richard Davis. "It was down to his ability to let a scene grow and not interfere with that." He died, in sadly reduced circumstances, in 1999. Though the Troubadour's current incarnation retains the name but very little of the original's spirit, many contemporary artists remain smitten with its lingering aura. "It's significant to still be able to go to LA and play that room," insists Texan singer-songwriter Sarah Jarosz, who recorded a live EP there in 2013. "It's not even that it's the best-sounding room in the world, but its history and vibe go a long way into making it special all these years later."

"There was a golden age for a few years," says Danny Kortchmar. "But it was more about the people, I think, than bricks and mortar. They were all smart and very articulate. And in the Troubadour they found a kind of home."

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: JUNE 1, 1972 (US); MAY 31, 1972 (UK)

EAGLES

Four country rock journeymen come to California to chase the American Dream and, defying the odds, take flight. BY BUD SCOPPA

THE EAGLES were the first band to take country rock to the top of the charts, but that would be merely the first chapter in their saga. The music made by these three Midwesterners and one Texan soon became synonymous with the California sound, as they carried on the The Byrds' legacy with their rich vocal harmonies, jangly guitars and ongoing internal tension. They drew from Gram Parsons' 'Cosmic American' music, Jackson Browne's intimate confessionals and Randy Newman's acerbic character studies, while putting their records together with the painstaking precision of crosstown rivals Steely Dan. *Eagles*, the group's 1972 debut album, put them on the fast lane to the very pinnacle of American music in the 1970s – belying their threadbare beginnings in groups that were going nowhere.

At the dawn of the '70s, the Troubadour, where The Eagles were hatched, was packed with guys like the four future band members, two of whom could barely afford the beers they were knocking back at the bar. In the club's cramped confines, the regulars couldn't help but rub elbows with each other, literally, some of them local heroes but most thirsting for a break or a score. As one regular, Linda Ronstadt, noted in 1974: "If you needed a new player, there was this big tank full of whoever's not busy at that point, so you just reach in and get one."

In need of players to back her on the tour behind her second album, 1970's *Silk Purse*, Ronstadt reached into the tank and, with a helping hand from producer/manager John Boylan, grabbed four. Two were veterans at loose ends: multi-instrumentalist Bernie Leadon, a Minneapolis transplant who'd recently bolted from the fraying Flying Burrito Brothers, and bass player/high-harmony specialist Randy Meisner, who'd been a founding member of Poco before jumping ship to Rick Nelson's Stone Canyon Band and was now thinking about heading back home to Nebraska. The other two were struggling neophytes: singer/guitarist Glenn Frey, who'd been half of obscure folk duo Longbranch Pennywhistle with JD Souther, and Don Henley, the singing drummer in struggling rock band Shiloh.

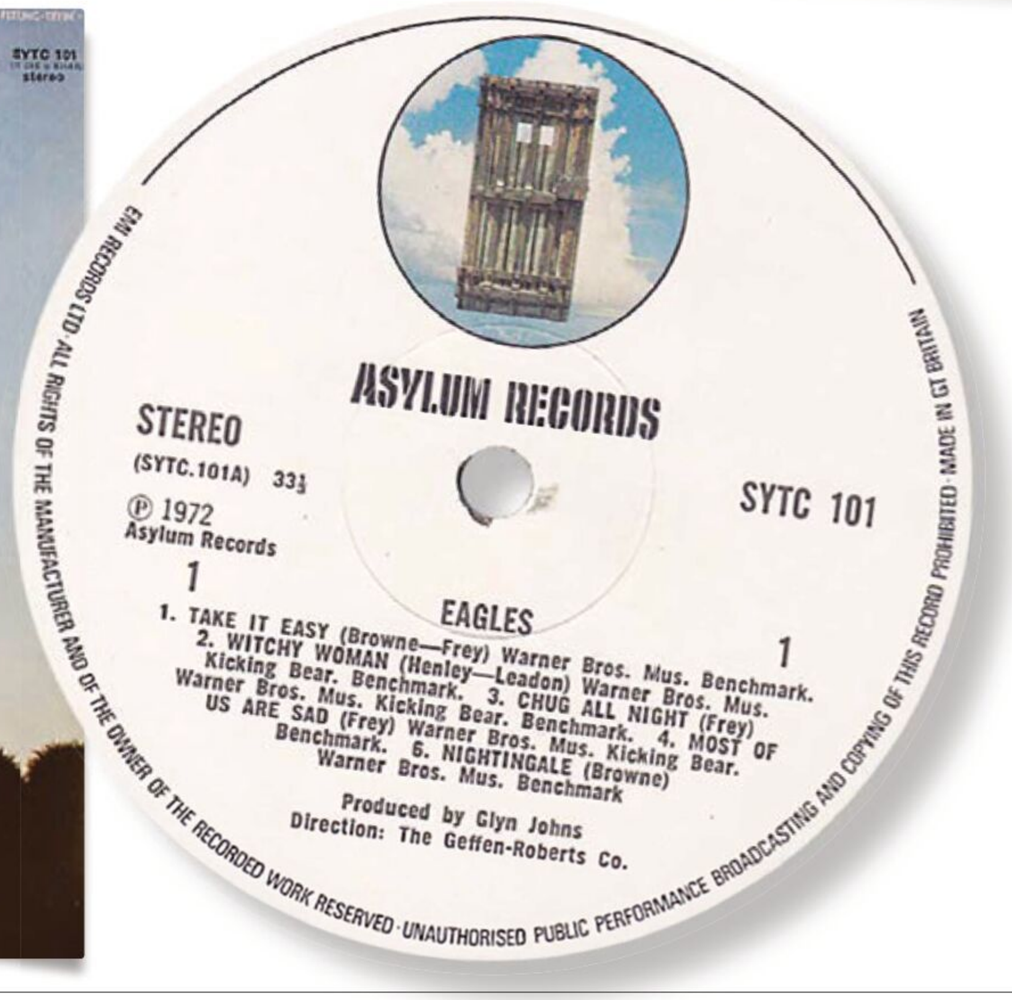
> **"There it was – the harmony blend from heaven. I was converted"**
> **GLYN JOHNS**

Frey and Souther were both from Detroit but didn't meet until each came to LA in search of fame and fortune. Signed to Jimmy Bowen's Amos Records after they teamed up in 1969, the duo recorded their lone LP with an all-star studio band that included guitarists James Burton and Ry Cooder, but the songs displayed little of the distinctiveness of Frey and Souther's subsequent writing, and the album stiffed. So did the Kenny Rogers-produced album cut by their labelmates Shiloh. But those shared experiences, along with countless nights hanging out together at the Troub, forged a bond between city boy Frey and Henley, a shy guy from a one-red-light hamlet in the northeast corner of Texas – "the Twilight Zone of the South", as he put it. The contrast between their vocal sounds was as distinct as the difference in their upbringings, Frey with his fallen-choirboy tenor, and Henley with a voice "like 400-grain sandpaper, rough but fine", as Souther described it.

As soon as they'd played their first tour date backing Ronstadt – in the "Magic Kingdom" of Disneyland, fittingly enough – Frey and Henley were so ecstatic about the chemistry they'd felt while playing together that they decided on the spot to form a band and talked Leadon and Meisner into joining them.

EAGLES

SYTC 101
stereo
ASYLUM RECORDS


ASYLUM RECORDS
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℗ 1972
Asylum Records
1
EAGLES
1. TAKE IT EASY (Browne—Frey) Warner Bros. Mus. Benchmark.
2. WITCHY WOMAN (Henley—Leadon) Warner Bros. Mus.
Kicking Bear. Benchmark. 3. CHUG ALL NIGHT (Frey)
Warner Bros. Mus. Kicking Bear. Benchmark. 4. MOST OF
US ARE SAD (Frey) Warner Bros. Mus. Kicking Bear.
Benchmark. 6. NIGHTINGALE (Browne)
Warner Bros. Mus. Benchmark
Produced by Glyn Johns
Direction: The Geffen-Roberts Co.
SYTC 101
1
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Accounts vary as to the origin of the name they came up with – Hopi legend, peyote with a tequila chaser and/or the omen-like appearance of an eagle in flight may have been involved – nor was there agreement about whether "The" was part of it. But what's inarguable is that "Eagles" was perfect for them, and it's a wonder it wasn't already taken. Before they flew away from Ronstadt, they accompanied her on one track from her self-titled 1972 album – a cover of Jackson Browne's "Rock Me On The Water".

During their time in LA, they'd figured out who the big-time players were, so they went to David Geffen and Elliot Roberts, whose management-company clients included Crosby, Stills & Nash, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell and Browne. Frey was familiar with the Geffen-Roberts offices at 9120 Sunset Blvd but suspected they were keener on Souther as a solo artist than their pairing. He decided to develop his other project to keep in the game. Leadon, the band's most seasoned member, did the talking, and Geffen bought the Eagles pitch.

Geffen's overarching ambition had compelled him to start a label, and following a meeting with Browne, Frey, Henley and singer-songwriter Ned Doheny that went down, bizarrely, in a Laurel Canyon sauna – he locked in the core roster of his start-up, Asylum Records, with Browne as the centrepiece. While still new kids in town, roommates Frey and Souther had become tight with Browne, their Echo Park neighbour, who was not only a gifted and prolific songwriter but also a tireless promoter of his friends, including Souther, Jack Tempchin, Frey and Doheny. Indeed, his support had been critical in convincing Geffen to sign the Eagles and Doheny to Asylum.

Early on, the idea of adding Souther to the band had come up. "It was probably based on the fact that JD could write and was another good-looking guy", Leadon told Barney Hoskyns. "But then it was like, 'Well, what's he gonna play? We don't need another guitar player.'"

In the autumn of 1971, Geffen dispatched the fledgling band to Aspen for some low-profile woodshedding. They billed themselves as Teen King & The Emergencies. Impressed by Glyn Johns' work on landmark LPs for the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, Frey asked Geffen to bring the in-demand British producer/engineer to Colorado to check them out. They played a set made up primarily of bar band staple cover songs; Glyn was not impressed. Pestered relentlessly by Geffen to come see a similar set in an LA rehearsal room, Johns was halfway out the door when the band begged him to stick around for one more song. They stood together with Leadon and Frey strumming acoustics and sang an original tune, "Most Of Us Are Sad", with Meisner singing lead and the others harmonising.

"There it was," Johns wrote in his memoir, *Sound Man: A Life Recording Hits With The Rolling Stones, The Who, Led Zeppelin, The Eagles, Eric Clapton, The Faces*. "The harmony blend from heaven. It knocked me clean off my feet... I was converted."

Rather than record in LA, The Eagles went to London's Olympic Studios, Johns' favourite facility. As the sessions progressed, the producer was able to coax a readily appealing sound out of the bandmembers, burnished enough to satisfy his need for rootsy authenticity, yet sufficiently sparkling to get Frey and Henley salivating about the prospect of scoring a radio hit or two. As Henley later pointed out, "We had four singers, and though we weren't the first band to feature a lineup like that, we wanted to make use of it in unique ways. We wanted to create material that would showcase each of the bandmembers' strengths."

> **"We wanted to create material to showcase each member's strengths"**
> **DON HENLEY**

That was the crucial challenge they faced – and met, with a little help from their friends. Meisner sang lead on his two solely written songs, the scorching "Take The Devil" and the infectious "Tryin'" – the closest the Eagles ever came to sounding like Poco – as well as "Most Of Us Are Sad", that heartfelt barstool ballad from Frey, whose rollicking paean to excess "Chug All Night" would've pleased his Detroit mentor, Bob Seger. Leadon decided to recut "Train Leaves Here This Morning", a languorous, country-tinged lament he'd written with Gene Clark and had originally recorded for *The Fantastic Expedition Of Dillard & Clark* in 1968, while teaming with Meisner on the bluegrass rave-up "Earlybird". Apart from that slice of substance-free showboating, these songs accomplished what the band and Johns had been shooting for, but it was clear that they were album tracks.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"In many ways, the Eagles are akin to America in that they somehow manage to incorporate every fashionable soft-rock device into their style, yet come up with some semblance of originality based on their songwriging ability. They're a fine band who present thier songs in a most appealing manner, decorating them with diverse natural harmonies and some equally effective instrumental backing... The Eagles are going to be a big group, both you and their West Coast mangers Geffen/Roberts can be assured of that."
ROY CARR, NME, JULY 15, 1972

"The Eagles, whose individual credentials are very strong indeed, have produced here the finest album of its kind in the country-rock idiom, full of elegance and such pretty songs yet not easing up for one moment... The real strength of the record lies in the quality of the songs... It's magical, summery music that seems to have been with us for years, a lovely breath of country air and a delight from start to finish. And to think – this is their debut."
RAY COLEMAN, MELODY MAKER, JULY 29, 1972

Fortunately, the surefire material they needed to take them over the top was literally right next door.

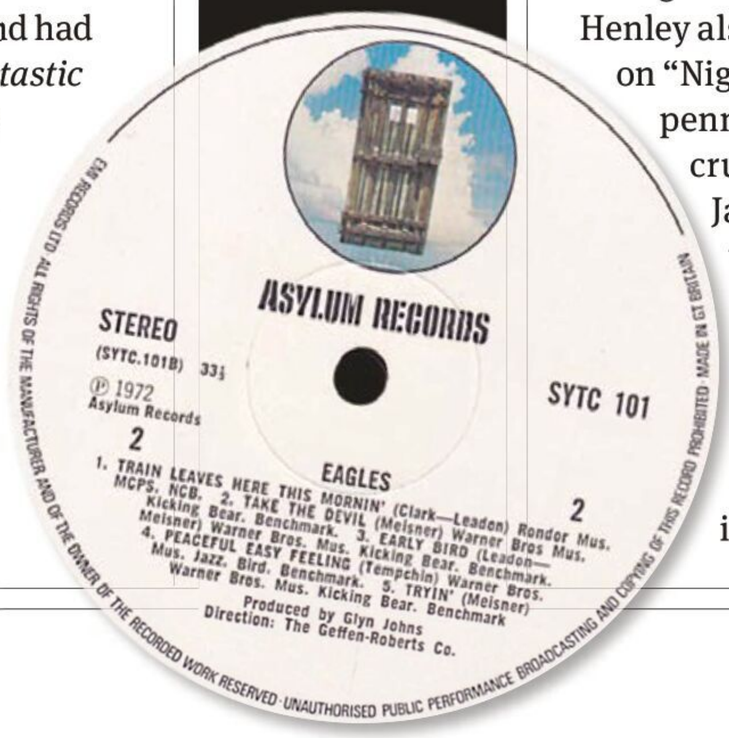
During a break in the middle of the recording sessions for his first album, Browne recalled, "I took a road trip in this old beat-up Willys Jeep, and I went to Utah and Arizona. On that trip, I started to write 'Take It Easy'. When I came back, I played it for Glenn, and he asked me if the Eagles could cut it when it was done. So I said, 'Just finish it'. He wrote the last verse and turned it into a real song. What those guys did with it was incredible."

WHEN this writer reviewed *Eagles* for *Rolling Stone*, I raved that their first single "Take It Easy" was "simply the best-sounding rock single to come out so far this year" thanks to its "danceable rhythm, catchy, winding melody, intelligent, affirmative lyrics, a progressively powerful arrangement mixing electric guitar and banjo, and a crisp vocal, with vibrant four-part harmony at just the right moments for maximum dramatic effect". A half-century later, "Take It Easy" still sounds like a perfectly designed and executed record. That was hit No 1.

Ohio-born Tempchin, another member of the posse, contributed "Peaceful Easy Feeling", a midtempo shuffle that epitomises the California sound. It turns on the vividly cinematic imagery in the verse, "*I like the way your sparkling earrings lay/ Against your skin so brown/I'd like to sleep with you in the desert tonight/ With a million stars all around*". The chorus harmonies are drop-dead gorgeous, as is the luminous mid-song guitar interplay from Leadon and Frey. That would become the third hit off the album.

Gratifyingly, their second breakthrough song was self-created. Henley had come up with lyrics and melody to go with a minor-key guitar passage Leadon had submitted to the band, titling the finished song "Witchy Woman". The track turns on Leadon and Frey's serrated guitars riffing in harmony, surrounding Henley's smouldering vocal like bolts of lightning. "Witchy Woman" was the first Eagles single to hit the US Top 10.

Henley also handled the lead vocal on "Nightingale", a Browne-penned, top-down highway cruiser too carefree for Jackson's album but just what the doctor ordered for the Eagles. Nonetheless, Johns was vehemently opposed to putting the track on the album; perhaps it he felt that including "Nightingale"



HENRY DILTZ

would tilt the feel of the record toward the Frey-driven rocking side of the band. The disagreement led Geffen to book time in an LA studio to recut the song with engineer Bill Halverson, and when Leadon called him to let him know, Johns was livid. After he calmed down, Johns agreed to recut "Nightingale" himself at Wally Heider's studio in Hollywood.

"It really did not turn out any better," he wrote in his book, "and my original decision to leave it off the record was correct in my opinion." The track nonetheless went on the album, "to appease Geffen."

It's telling that Meisner had three lead vocals on the album to Henley's two. That retrospectively confounding decision is attributable in part to the fact that the group was then operating as a democracy, and partly because no-one – apparently including Geffen and Johns – was yet aware that their singing drummer possessed a unique, force-of-nature voice. But in their bright-eyed innocence, the Eagles had made the most balanced album they'd ever

Stoked (l-r): Randy Meisner, Bernie Leadon, Don Henley, Glenn Frey in the desert before the photoshoot for the gatefold sleeve of their debut album in Joshua Tree national park

release, on their very first attempt.

Eagles would peak at No 22 on the *Billboard* chart and take until 2001 to hit a million sales, but in reviewing the record I became convinced that LA would become ground zero for whatever was coming next in pop music. I wasn't the only one to become an instant fan. Irving Azoff, a young manager from Downstate Illinois who'd talked his way into a job at Geffen-Roberts, has an indelible memory of his first Eagles show.

"It was like seeing The Beatles – I thought it was that good," Azoff insisted. "Funny thing, I always thought that when I first saw them, for me it was the Frey/Henley band. The hype in those days was that Randy Meisner came from Poco and Bernie Leadon came from the Flying Burrito Brothers. I went, 'Hmm, sidemen.'"

That thought never left Azoff's mind as he took over the day-to-day management of the group, and slowly but surely, the Eagles would morph from a four-way democracy into the Frey/Henley band Irving had envisioned all along. During his induction speech at the 1998 Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, Henley acknowledged his longtime manager with the barbed quip, "He may be Satan, but he's our Satan." Maybe the devil made them do it.

SLEEVE NOTES EAGLES

1 Take It Easy ★★★★★
2 Witchy Woman ★★★★
3 Chug All Night ★★★
4 Most Of Us Are Sad ★★★★
5 Nightingale ★★★★
6 Train Leaves Here This Morning ★★★★
7 Take The Devil ★★★★
8 Earlybird ★★
9 Peaceful Easy Feeling ★★★★★
10 Tryin' ★★★★

LABEL: Asylum
PRODUCED BY: Glyn Johns
RECORDED AT: Olympic Studios, London; Wally Heider Recording, Hollywood
PERSONNEL: Glenn Frey (vocals, guitars, slide guitar), Bernie Leadon (vocals, guitars, banjo), Randy Meisner (vocals, bass), Don Henley (vocals, drums)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 22

"We are sons of the desert": the Eagles at Joshua Tree, California, March 1972

“WE WANTED IT ALL. WHY NOT?”

And where should four ambitious musicians head, to capture an essence of “sunshine, California and the mystique of the music business”? Well, England, obviously! After extensive woodshedding in US ski resorts, the young Eagles make for wintry, electrically and culinarily backward London. “You had to walk into six small shops to make a meal,” BERNIE LEADON tells NICK HASTED. “The ladies in them would call you ‘dearie’.”

HENRY DILTZ

Peyote campfire: (l–r) Henley, Leadon, Frey and Meisner prepare for the *Eagles* cover shoot, 1972

UNCUT FEBRUARY 2022

FEBRUARY 1972. For these four Americans more used to the temperate Californian climate, London in the depths of winter was not the most propitious place to be. But the intense cold was not the only thing the Eagles had to contend with while they recorded their debut album at Olympic Studios. As guitarist Bernie Leadon recalls, "We're really close to getting this one cut – 'Just one more – come on, guys!' We get it, the final note is struck, and right as that ring-out decayed into nothing, the power went off. The machines all stopped. We went into the control room, because the talkback had cut out. Our producer Glyn Johns said, 'Well, we'll just have to listen to it tomorrow...' It was a blackout, due to the strikes."

Viewed from a distance of 50 years, the irony of the situation is not lost on Leadon. Here they were, recording laidback, sun-baked country-rock while crisp layers of frost lay thick on the ground outside the studio and Britain was in the grip of a miners' strike, causing electricity shortages and power cuts. The album they recorded – including "Take It Easy", "Witchy Woman" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling" – helped define Southern California's sound during the early '70s – yet the temperature in their rented Maida Vale digs rarely rose above zero. Hell might not have frozen over, but the pipes almost certainly did. "It was a huge culture shock," recalled Don Henley to *Uncut* in 2015. "Trying to find Mexican food in London... and the burgers were horrible!"

At this point, Leadon and his compadres Glenn Frey, Don Henley and Randy Meisner had only been together six months. Many bands in a similar predicament would perhaps have called it a day. But the Eagles were already well advanced with their masterplan – which had led them to chilly London in the first place, specifically to work with Johns, whose track record – The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, The Who – was unimpeachable. "We weren't perfectionists," Henley argued. "We did strive for excellence, and that's two different things. We just tried to make that Eagles record good. I just want to do the best I can do."

THE four men had been in acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful bands before. This time, they left nothing to chance. As Leadon confirms, "We asked ourselves, 'What was our MO? What are we doing here?' We wanted it all. Why not? We wanted artistic success, the approval of our peers, commercial success and to be well paid. We had what we called the LCD Show – Lowest Common Denominator. We rehearsed so that if two guys have flu and two of the others aren't speaking, most of the audience wouldn't know. I came to look at bands as entrepreneurial, young businesses. Consistency and discipline is a lot of how we succeeded."

Consistency? Discipline? These qualities stood the Eagles in great stead – then, as now. Fifty years on, the Eagles will play a run of UK and European shows, including Hyde Park this summer. Only Henley now remains from the original lineup. But in the winter of 1972, for all their uncommon planning and professionalism, the four original Eagles were a happy and united group, with a delicate balance of talent. "They were all equally important," acknowledges Glyn Johns. "Henley's strongest contribution was his voice. The same with Frey. Bernie Leadon was great on banjo and guitar, and Randy Meisner was a fine bass player, with a voice of extraordinary range. What I was dealing with was those four people. Without any one of them, it wouldn't have been the same."

Country rock was well established by the time all four future Eagles had fetched up in Los Angeles. "Even in our small town in Texas," Henley explained, "we'd read about The Flying Burrito Brothers and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Poco and bought their albums." As with many of the bands who helped pioneer the LA country sound, the Eagles were

HENRY DILTZ

mostly migrants. "I was born in Texas, Glenn Frey is from Michigan, Randy Meisner was from Nebraska – only Bernie Leadon grew up in California," Henley explained. "So yeah, it was an amalgam of America. And Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young are from even further afield, though Crosby is Californian, I think. So it was an imported sound."

Henley arrived in town in June 1970 while still a member of Shiloh. Randy Meisner was in Poco, while Leadon had been in foundational country-rock bands Dillard & Clark and The Flying Burrito Brothers. Frey, meanwhile, had moved to Los Angeles in 1969, where he'd formed country-rock duo Longbranch Pennywhistle, with aspiring Texan songwriter JD Souther. The pair wound up living in the same grungy Echo Park apartment complex as Jackson Browne. "We were penniless, living in these rat houses," says Browne. "We were each other's peer group." When David Geffen formed Asylum Records to release Browne's debut, Browne loyally pushed Frey forward for his consideration. Geffen's response? "You need a band."

> **"We only had three or four songs, but Geffen said, 'Let's do this.' We were Asylum's first band"**
>
> BERNIE LEADON

"In 1971, the folk club circuit still existed," Leadon explains. "That was where people like us gathered, and that was the world we came out of. We'd all studied vocals, harmonies and older folk songs and melodies, as well as rock'n'roll and R&B." Their unofficial base became the bar at Doug Weston's Troubadour on Santa Monica Boulevard, West Hollywood. "Ronstadt, Crosby and Chris Hillman were always there," says photographer Henry Diltz. "Amongst the people who arrived in LA and hung out there were Glenn Frey, JD Souther and Don Henley."

By summer '71 Henley was spending most nights at the Troubadour, "getting ready to call it quits". He met Frey, who told him he wanted to put a band together. Going on the road with Ronstadt's band, they made their own plans at night. Meisner joined after playing with Ronstadt one weekend at Disneyland. Her manager-producer, John Boylan, paid for a rehearsal studio where they auditioned Leadon. "We just played songs and went, 'Yeah, I think so,'" Leadon says. "Then we got a funky, cheap rehearsal place near the Hollywood Bowl and started woodshedding.

"Meisner was the most laidback and passive. Henley and Frey were both control freaks! Frey was the dominant personality – he was go-go-go. I was somewhere in between. I was very driven. I'd left Hollywood partying behind to go back to the beach lifestyle, living near Malibu and the mountains."

"They called it 'the Eagles' because they always had that desert music," Diltz believes. "Glenn Frey especially would say, 'We are sons of the desert!' Frey was from Detroit, but he came out seeking that Southwestern, desert experience – sunshine and California and the whole mystique of the music business here."

Boylan suggested they try Geffen, whose Sunset Strip management office with Elliot Roberts was as starry and hip as the Troubadour. "They handled Crosby, Stills & Nash, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell – everybody, really," Diltz recalls. "Graham Nash would always have his hand outstretched, holding out a joint."

Geffen liked what he heard. "We only had three or four songs," Leadon remembers. "But he said, 'OK, let's do this.' We were Asylum's first band, with David as manager." In a saga where laidback hippy art and sharp business sense combined more nakedly than usual, it was the Eagles' biggest break. "Geffen was a rocket ship going to the moon," Leadon says admiringly.

"He was ready to launch, had all the skills. He said, 'Don't make trouble, and hold on!'"

The wildly ambitious ➤

THE RONSTADT FACTOR

Singer needs band: finds all that and more

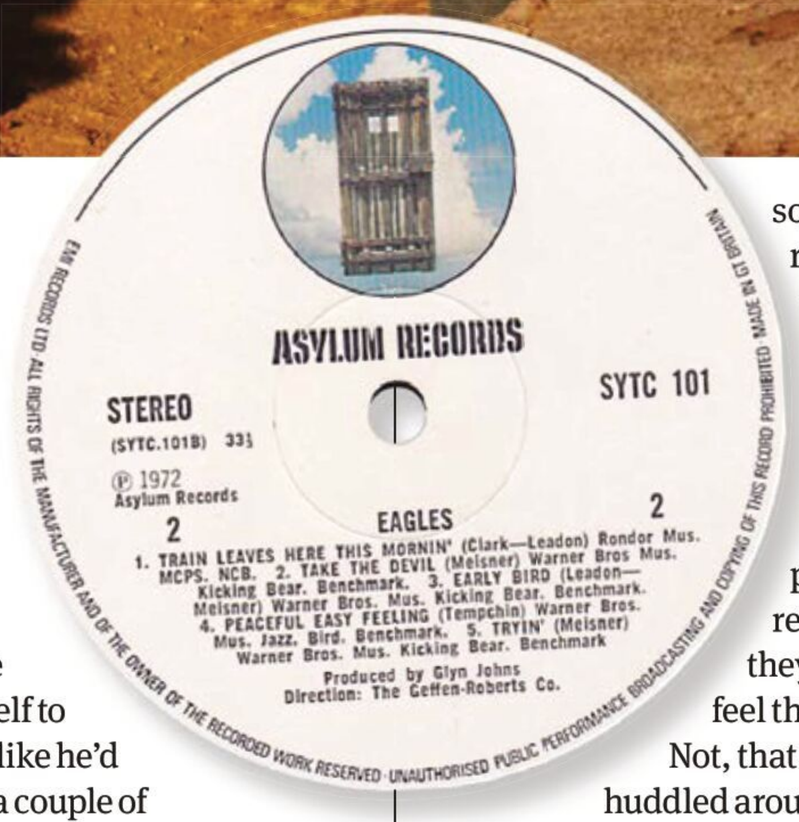
"THERE'S a Linda Ronstadt connection to everything," Bernie Leadon believes. "I worked in her band the Corvettes in '69. Then later Henley and Frey got hired by her, briefly Randy Meisner too. She'd been having significant hits since '67, but because she wasn't a writer or musician, she sought out both diligently. If you said you were a songwriter, she'd give you an acoustic guitar, put you in a corner and say, 'Play me your best song.' I saw her do it."

"She loved all the boys in the band, and she loved being part of a band," adds Henry Diltz. "She got those future Eagles to back her up because she needed them. Not playing anything made her a catalyst. And she was the most wonderful singer. Don Henley sang 'Desperado' beautifully with that flinty voice. But Linda Ronstadt's full-throated voice sang it better."

Linda Ronstadt: "She was the most beautiful singer"

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Prickly bunch: the Eagles try out locations for their debut album shoot



group next set their sights on a producer. "John Boylan wanted to do it," Leadon says. "But Frey wanted someone top-tier."

"I was at the Troubadour with Mick Jagger watching Billy Preston," remembers Johns. "Glenn Frey came up and introduced himself to me at the bar. He looked like he'd been sleeping rough for a couple of years. He said he had a band that he was very keen to have me produce."

Geffen sent the Eagles far away from LA's spotlight to Colorado ski resorts to effectively rehearse in public – playing The Gallery in Aspen, then Tulagi in Boulder. "We were doing covers and a few songs Glenn had written," says Henley. "But they didn't care – they were so drunk and so high, they'd dance to anything!" Meisner remembers playing "Witchy Woman" and an early, R&B version of "Take It Easy". "We played four sets a night, and become a band," Leadon says. Geffen's office flew Johns up in December. "It was very badly attended and the sound was terrible," Johns says bluntly. "Henley and Randy were caught between Glenn Frey on one side, who thought he was a rock'n'roll guitar-player, and the acoustic genius of Bernie Leadon, who had far more of a country feel. The material wasn't that impressive. It was a mess."

"We came back to LA and tried to write some songs," Henley remembered. Geffen, meanwhile, didn't give up. "He phoned me and said I'd made a huge mistake," says Johns. The producer suggested the Eagles play for him again in a rehearsal room. "When they ran their set, I didn't feel that differently about it." Not, that is, until the band huddled around an acoustic guitar to sing Meisner's "Take The Devil". "It completely blew me away. Once I copped their four-part harmony mix, it opened my eyes to the possibilities."

They rehearsed further with Johns. Then the Eagles flew to London.

> "I THINK they wanted to get us away from the drugs and the women," Henley decided. "None of us had ever been out of the country before, except for Bernie, who'd been on the road with the Burritos." Nevertheless, the Eagles made the 6,000-mile trip across the Atlantic to record their debut at Olympic Studios in Barnes. They brought some of their LA traits with them – presumably as creature comforts. Meisner recalled sneaking round the back of the studio for a joint or a shot of tequila.

"I didn't know anything about their partying habits back home – that wasn't in my brief," says Johns. "If they did take anything, I didn't notice. Because I wasn't having any of that going on. I'd had it for years when I couldn't control it, as an engineer. I had waited months of my life while the Stones got their shit together. I wasn't going to take it any more. That's one of the reasons why the Eagles stopped working with me later."

Leadon, whose Anglophile, cribbage-playing uncle had served alongside the British Army in World War I, has fond memories of a Burritos show at the Lyceum Ballroom in 1970. Still, their cramped Maida Vale digs left something to be desired. "The bedroom that I had didn't have a bed in it. It had a pallet on the floor. I can't believe I actually slept in that apartment... but let's say I did."

In contrast to LA, London seemed like a step back in time. "Some things were delightful. Barnes was still a bit of a village, with a greengrocer, butchers, and another store that just had candles," Leadon laughs. "You had to walk into six small shops to make a meal, the ladies in them would call you dearie, you'd pay 'em and they'd say, 'Ta.' All that was just lovely. Were we cooking for each other? No. We ate out exclusively. We didn't have a kitchen anyway. We didn't go socialising much, either – just the pub and a couple of clubs. We saw Muddy Waters at the Speakeasy and the Stones were there."

The English winter was felt most bitterly at Olympic. "The studios then were large because they had been designed for orchestras," Leadon explains. "Glyn would tailor the room by having the band set up as if on stage in the middle, then he'd put screens around us to make the sound less cavernous. But these studios were hard to heat, it

HENRY DILTZ

"HE WAS AN ARCHITECT"

How Gary Burden built *Eagles'* sleeve

"GARY BURDEN was an architect," Henry Diltz says, recalling the pioneering work done by Burden, the designer of some of the '70s most iconic album covers. "He was fixing Mama Cass's house, and she told him, 'If you can make a blueprint, you can make an album sleeve.'" His work on the Eagles' debut certainly boasts architectural ambition. "Gary had the idea he would print this thing 24 x 24 inches," Diltz explains, "like four album covers in a square, opening like a poster. When I was high on peyote he told me, 'Just get on your hands and knees and photograph the desert floor,' for the inner sleeve. The album was supposed to wrap around it, with a picture on the bottom of the Eagles around the campfire, and then right at the very pinnacle in blue sky was an eagle flying. It would have been very beautiful. But David Geffen thought, 'That's too far out,' and told the printers, 'Just glue it shut.' Which was really stupid, because now the inner spread is upside-down! Geffen made similar last-minute changes on *Desperado* and *On The Border*. So he saved three cents an album! His business sense and Gary's design sense kept butting heads."

Back in the fold: the poster that should have been a sleeve

was cold. It just seemed damp. The assistant kids in the control room were called teaboys. We were like – 'Boy, more tea!' If we had any time off, Henley and I would go to a club in Kensington High Street that had a sauna, to keep warm. That could carry us for a couple of hours.

"It was hard because we were just cold," Leadon continues. "But Glyn had the leadership ability to get us to focus. 'Try it this way. Great, you got it – let's put the vocals on!' It was bit of a shock to us because we did the whole thing in three weeks, working five days a week. We weren't staying in a place we wanted to hang out. So we just worked!"

Johns has little sympathy for the band's frost-bitten travails: "They weren't there for the weather – they were there to make a record!"

Leadon is keen to highlight the contributions Johns made to the fledgling Eagles sound. "We all knew how to arrange and we already had the basic sound because of the time we spent in Aspen, rehearsing regularly and working on songs. But I would never have focused on the vocals. Glyn had more experience than us, he knew that you had to have a unique sound. He had already decided that the vocal thing would be the centrepiece."

"I built it around harmonies," agrees Johns. "I tried to make the best of each of their abilities. On 'Take It Easy', there's double-time banjo, which is pretty odd. That was my idea. It makes a big difference and it's pretty difficult to play. But Bernie did it in one take. I remember being excited by what we were doing. I thought they were, too."

With a shortage of material, Leadon reached back to a co-write with Guy Clark – "Train Leaves Here This Morning" from 1968's *The Fantastic Expedition Of Dillard And Clark*.

"The main difference from Dillard & Clark is Glenn's electric guitar solo," Leadon explains. "But the Eagles rendition is very country, folky and stripped down. There's electric lead, electric bass and drums, but they're lightly played. It's singer-songwriter-type, stripped-down production and vocal-oriented."

This was just how Johns liked it. But Frey, who had wanted the producer so badly, still itched to rock out. Johns was having none of it. "I'd worked with some pretty innovative characters in that area," he says. "I didn't feel that Glenn Frey could compete!" Leadon argues that the conflict between the band's country and rock camps is exaggerated. "Frey was very capable of playing tasteful music in a more folk vein – Longbranch Pennywhistle were acoustic singer-songwriters. I'd been in a Top 40 rock covers band. There was creative tension – but Eagles songs achieved a synthesis. We couldn't have carried on if we hadn't."

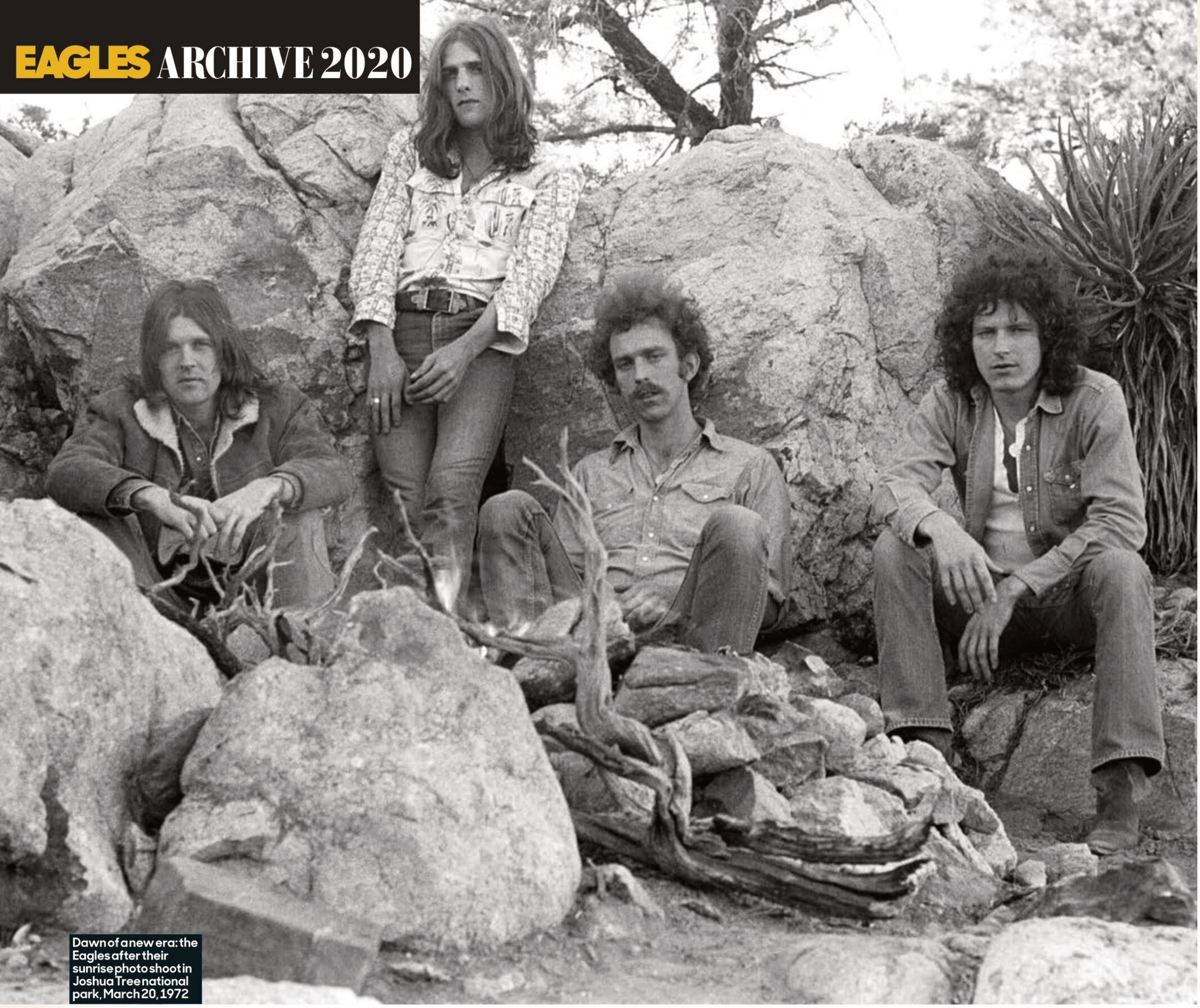
The conflict with Frey also raised the question of just whose band the Eagles was – which continued to chafe until years later, when Leadon and Meisner left. "They started out as equals, influencing each other," Johns believes. "That changed when Henley and Frey started writing more. Was this album more democratic? Yes, it was. But Frey and I didn't ever get on, really. I didn't like him. And I don't think he liked me."

EAGLES included just one Henley song, his Leadon co-write "Witchy Woman", rounded out by collaborations with their peers, including Jackson Browne and Frey's majestically languid calling card "Take It Easy" and Jack Tempchin's "Peaceful Easy Feeling". Browne's "Nightingale", discarded in London, was re-recorded back in LA on Geffen's insistence, to give Henley a second lead.

"When we went back home, Randy freaks out and calls a band meeting," Leadon laughs. "He wants to trash-can the whole thing and start over. He thinks it's not good, he's paranoid, he's afraid. Glyn had to fly out and calm us down." Such last-minute panics aside, the Eagles' first album was finished.

The band left the Troubador shortly after it shut at 2am, reaching the Joshua Tree National Park three hours later. Accompanied by Henry Diltz, they intended to photograph the sleeve for Eagles as the sun rose. "We took a guide who knew the desert," says Diltz. "We went to a secret mountaintop, where certain Hollywood actors would take psychedelics. You don't drive in like a tourist; you go in the back way, on dirt roads, opening fences on private property. We started sucking peyote ➤

"We went to a mountaintop where certain Hollywood actors would take psychedelics"
HENRY DILTZ



Dawn of a new era: the Eagles after their sunrise photo shoot in Joshua Tree national park, March 20, 1972

buttons before we got there – plenty of God's herb – and ice-cold beer. By the time we climbed to the top, dawn was breaking.

"There was a natural rock semicircle where we built a fire," Diltz continues. "We weren't fucked-up high, but high in a very pleasant, funny way. We'd smoke a little grass, they got their instruments out. Bernie was playing his banjo, with his shirt off. Glenn had to use the commode behind some rocks. He looked up and said, 'Eagle! Eagle!' He rushed out pulling his pants up, pointing up at the air. Don remembers it was really a hawk. Gary [*Burden, designer*] thought it was a crow. But it was a lovely omen. We spent quite a number of hours around the campfire. It was a bonding experience for all of us. Except I remember Randy didn't eat the peyote. He stood to one side with a smile on his face, not quite as engaged in the hilarity. We all mellowed out around the campfire 'til we came down a bit and then we drove back. I never went back to that spot. I couldn't even find it."

Diltz's photographs reveal a fully connected band, comfortable in each other's company. Looked at now, it could be seen as a rare moment of peace before the harsher realities of the band's coming success set in. "Being the first band on Asylum meant we got special attention in radio promotion," Leadon says. "David Geffen paid for his own radio guy to go on the road with Atlantic's guy. David's was younger, hipper and his only job is to promote the one record Asylum had out. So we got played on a lot of radio stations and that's why 'Take It Easy' was a hit. I was hanging out down on Topanga Beach, and people there were like, 'Wow. You're in that band?' Because suddenly it was being played all the time. By the middle of summer 'Witchy Woman' was on the chart, and by summer's end so was 'Peaceful Easy Feeling'."

"We weren't perfectionists. We did strive for excellence and that's two different things"

DON HENLEY

"Take It Easy" was the real hit – reaching No 12 in the States, while the album, released on June 1, 1972, reached No 22. Leadon considers what was special about the album: "There'd already been country rock bands, like Poco. But they didn't have the success the Eagles did. I would say our vocal stamp, that particular blend, was better than most. But the biggest reason the Eagles were successful was the fact that Geffen was promoting it."

"As the Eagles we did have success right off the bat," reflects Henley. "I learned a lot from Geffen, about the realities of the business. And at the end of the day, he did give us a contract, which I appreciate, the fact that he signed us to the label and got us into the spotlight."

Having planned their ascent so meticulously, how did the Eagles take to instant success?

"Well, anyone can have a plan," Leadon argues. "We knew it was possible, because we had sought out the top-tier talent in each category. But whose plans come to fruition? Whose plans succeed beyond your wildest dreams, even? I look back on the Eagles as a huge blessing."

HENRY DILTZ

"LA IS THE MELTING POT..."

CALIFORNIA, JUNE 1972. *MM*'s Ray Coleman meets the Eagles on their home turf. "The best thing about this band," Bernie Leadon tells him, "is that everyone can sing lead, everyone writes, nobody lays down the law."

MELODY MAKER JUNE 17, 1972

LOS ANGELES. Any slogging session musician unhappy with the prospect of bleak years of backing big names on records, concerts, or even accompanying non-stars and lesser talents, should take heart from this story.

It's about the sudden breakthrough of four players who had run the gamut of gigging around until they believed their future lay in getting together a regular back-up band – then when they finally did that their own sound became a hit.

THE GROUP IS THE EAGLES. They have been together under that name for just seven months, but have belonged to the West Coast country-rock clique for several years. Currently they are breaking through with a USA chart single, a potential smash album, and are on the present Jethro Tull tour of America, reaching huge audiences.

In the complicated network of friends that makes David Geffen's Asylum Record label a spiritual home for many musicians, the Eagles' position is deeply entrenched. In Hollywood, your taxi driver is quite likely to be a musician (the one who drove me to meet the Eagles said he'd just written some songs for Buck Owens and that his wife knew Neil Young. He seemed honest...).

This environment of rock utopia breeds chain links of musicians who seem to go round in circles as well as clans. The Eagles could probably be tagged as the ones who got away from the circuit and "made it".

FIRST, THE LINEUP: Glenn Frey (lead guitar), who has worked a lot with Bo Diddley and Linda Ronstadt; Bernie Leadon (rhythm guitar, banjo), ex-leading figure in The Flying Burrito Brothers; Randy Melsner (bass guitar), formerly with Poco; and Don Henley (drums) who regularly backed Linda Ronstadt.

They got together originally as a back-up band for Linda, at the suggestion of Jackson Browne, a friend of Glenn Frey. But after one or two sessions together, they decided their sound was too good to just accompany and, now-or-never, they ought to try to crack the barrier alone.

Jackson Browne was enthusing about the band and around last Christmas, Bernie Leadon walked into the Sunset Boulevard office of Asylum Records boss David Geffen and said: "Okay – we're a new band and we're here. What are you going to do with us?"

By February, the Eagles had been born and had flown to London to record under the supervision of Glyn Johns. There was a power strike at the time, and Leadon recalls with a smile the independent generator that was hurriedly imported into London's Olympic Studios so that they wouldn't waste too much money by being here and out of work.

With years of experience each and nearly enough songs to make an album, they worked well and hurriedly got a few more songs together in the studios. They are unanimous in their unstinting praise of Glyn Johns:

"I've never worked with anyone in Los Angeles who has the same sort of mind as Glyn," said Bernie. "He produced us as well as engineered us. I think we'd all wanted to record in London, ever since we heard those early Beatles and Stones records – the mystique of British rock! I dunno – the sound seems just great. It's such a different atmosphere and we love it."

Although none of the Eagles is from Hollywood – Glenn is from Detroit, Bernie San Diego, Randy Nebraska and Don Texas – they echo the feeling still gaining momentum that Los Angeles is the creative fulcrum for today's musicians.

"We just fancied breaking the pattern and recording in London," said Don, "and anyway, David Geffen knew Glyn Johns well. But you look at the liner notes of most of the albums, and most of the stuff ends up being recorded here. LA is the melting pot for all of today's music and I can't see things changing. Even New York musicians find a different atmosphere and attitude out here that ties in with making music."

BERNIE SAID: "There are so many musicians around out here, it's almost ludicrous. That's one of the reasons we're lucky to have found each other, really. There are about 50 little cliques in this town, and we just happen to be part of the same musical family."

"Sometimes," interrupted Glenn, "I forget there are people in the world who don't play an instrument. Living in this place is like living in a recording studio – everyone, it seems, is signed to a record company, or planning to get signed, or they own a record company."

"Whoever you are," said Don, "if you play and you're a decent musician, you'll get a record contract in Los Angeles. The competition to sign up musicians is terrific among the record companies."

That might sound like self-deprecation, but the Eagles appear to have paid their dues. Before going on the road with Jethro Tull and later with Procol Harum, they have rehearsed their act with some gruelling sets – four nights a week for a month in a small bar in Aspen, Colorado.

"Three hundred and fifty people a night, elbow to elbow – we loved it," said Glenn, because we had an audience and we could see their reaction to our music. It was a marvellous run-in."

> **"We all wanted to record in London, ever since we heard Beatles and Stones records"**
> **BERNIE LEADON**

Musically, the Eagles may best be described as clean, fresh country-rock, but it's the simplicity of their sound and strength of their vocals that lifts them into something special.

"The best thing about this band," remarked Bernie, "is that everyone can sing lead, everyone writes, nobody lays down the law, and everyone even gets a chance to be a back-up singer. So it's much more satisfying than being a solo artist and far better than being a back-up band. So you get off both ways!"

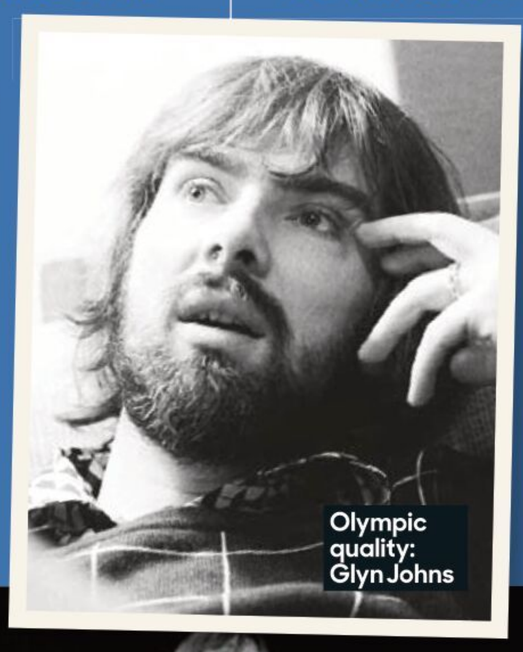
THE SIMPLE NAME. Eagles was coined by Bernie, who had read books on Indian mythology. "Certain spiritual powers are attributed to Eagles," he said. "It's high soaring, flying closer to the sun than any other bird, and it's spiritually the richest of them all."

"Eagles also sounds athletic, or a street game, and anyway it's very American in a funny way," chipped in Glenn.

We walked out into the blistering sunshine and Randy said how excited they all were with such immediate success.

"Los Angeles is always about two years ahead of the rest of the country, so we're hoping for a long and successful life as a group."

They seem to have the credentials and vitality needed to inject some new blood into the transatlantic rock scene.


Olympic quality: Glyn Johns

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

Taking flight: the Eagles on stage in Amsterdam, 1972

RELEASED: APRIL 17, 1973

DESPERADO

Country rock's Wild Bunch ride again. An early dive into the concept album blurs the distinction between slinging guns and guitars.

BY ANDREW MUELLER

THERE'S no mileage in messing about with a concept album: it is very much a "go big, or go home" kind of endeavour. By that measure, *Desperado* is a great concept album, at once magnificent and ridiculous (when the time came to send promo copies to radio stations in some key US markets, they were delivered by stagecoach). The concept, as such, was not subtle. Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Bernie Leadon and Randy Meisner appeared on the sepia-filtered front cover dressed as Old West gunslingers; on the rear cover, they – plus JD Souther and Jackson Browne – were trussed corpses, gloated over by a posse including the Eagles' tour manager, Tommy Nixon, and the producer of *Desperado*, Glyn Johns. (Though *Desperado* was recorded in London, the photo session took place at the more thematically congruent location of the Paramount Movie Ranch in Santa Monica, setting for *The Cisco Kid* and *Gunsmoke*, among other productions.)

The idea came together during a jam between Frey, Henley, Souther and Jackson Browne after a Tim Hardin show. Frey was keen to develop a concept album about anti-heroes for the Eagles in the hope of the band being taken more seriously; Browne showed him a book on gunfighters he'd received as a 21st birthday gift from Ned Doheny and the seed of a theme was planted. It was neither the first nor the last time that rock'n'roll musicians would attempt to position themselves as spiritual heirs of the cowboys of yore: even Elton John had done it on 1970's *Tumbleweed Connection*, and among the many things for which *Desperado* would ultimately prove answerable is Bon Jovi's "Wanted: Dead Or Alive". And it is not, in fairness, an altogether risible conceit: both vocations involve frequently rugged travelling, often disreputable company, bad food, cool clothes and (in America, certainly) heading west in search of glory, fortune and/or a picturesque early death.

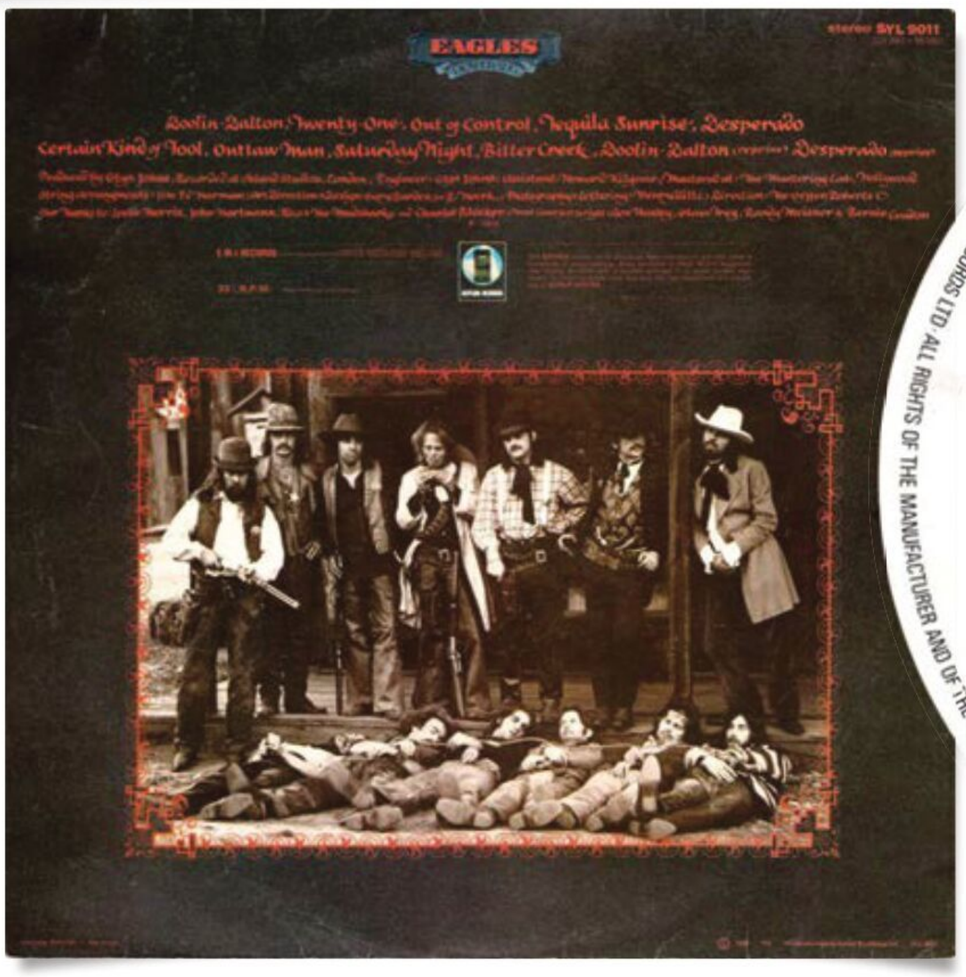
But that's not – or not entirely – what the Eagles were getting at. Explaining himself to Cameron Crowe in *Zoo World* magazine after the album's release, Glenn Frey grasped, only slightly abashedly, towards some metaphysical overlap between musicians and outlaws. Both, as Frey saw it, operated "outside the laws of normality... I mean, I feel like I'm breaking the law all the time. What we live and what we do is kind of a fantasy."

> **"I feel like I'm breaking the law all the time. What we do is a fantasy"**
> **GLENN FREY**

The macabre tableau on the rear cover of *Desperado* was a visual accompaniment/introduction to the album's opening track. The picture of the Eagles, Souther and Browne as dead outlaws was a homage to, if not quite a recreation of, famous posthumous portraits of the Dalton Gang, who robbed banks and bailed up trains across the Old West until they pushed their luck beyond its limits in Coffeyville, Kansas, in 1892. As told in Browne's book, during a clearly over-ambitious attempt to turn over two banks simultaneously, four of the Dalton Gang – including two of the Dalton brothers – were shot dead by townsfolk and US marshals. Bill Dalton survived, and went into business with another bandit, Bill Doolin.

About 80 years later, the Eagles opened their second album with "Doolin-Dalton". A co-write with Browne and Souther, it is musically and lyrically a fanfare for what follows. A knelling acoustic guitar and keening harmonica introduce the idea of the itinerant brigand as existential anti-hero, wallowing somewhat in ▶

EAGLES
DESPERADO


EAGLES
stereo SYL 9011
Doolin-Dalton, Twenty One, Out of Control, Tequila Sunrise, Desperado
Certain Kind of Fool, Outlaw Man, Saturday Night, Bitter Creek, Doolin-Dalton (reprise) Desperado

ASYLUM RECORDS
STEREO
(SYL.9011A) 33⅓
℗ 1973
Asylum Records
1
SYL 9011
DESPERADO
1. DOOLIN-DALTON (Frey—Souther—Henley—Browne)
2. TWENTY ONE (Leadon). 3. OUT OF CONTROL (Henley—Frey—Nixon)
4. TEQUILA SUNRISE (Henley—Frey)
5. DESPERADO (Henley—Frey)
Warner Bros. Music Ltd.
EAGLES
Produced by Glyn Johns
1
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the seedy glamour of it all. "*Easy money and faithless women/Red-eye whiskey for the pain,*" croon Henley and Frey, noting one of the unarguable similarities between the lifestyles of subjects and singers. "Doolin-Dalton" becomes a recurring motif of *Desperado* – a sprightly bluegrass instrumental version appears later on the album, and proceedings are eventually brought to an elegiac close with a medley of "Doolin-Dalton" and a rewritten and extended version of the title track.

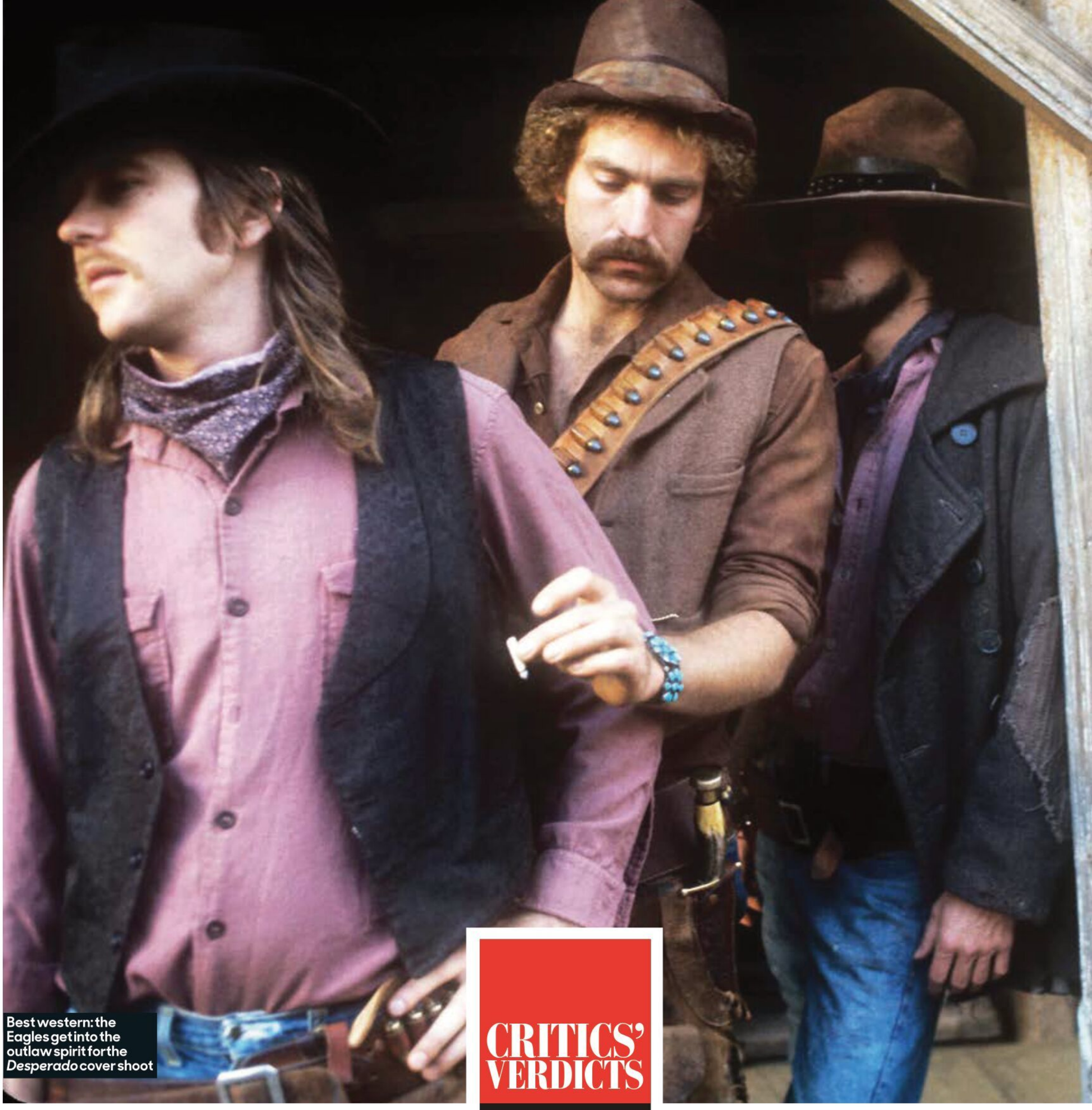
On which subject, it is incredible to reflect, at this distance, that the Eagles seem not to have understood – to expand the over-arching metaphor to incorporate the California gold rushes – what a mighty treasure they had unearthed. "Desperado" is – if Spotify metrics are any guide – one of the Eagles' five best-loved songs, even before cover versions are counted. At the time, "Desperado" wasn't even released as a single. The record company were baffled by it, and indeed by the album in general. The band were unhappy with it, feeling like Glyn Johns had rushed them through the recording. The musicians from the London Symphony Orchestra who filled out the Billy Sherrill-style string parts were bored by it, irritably playing chess between takes. As late as 2015, Henley said he still wished he could re-do the lead vocal.

There is really no pleasing some people. "Desperado" is – surely – the song for which even the most adamantine of Eagles-loathers has to extend some measure of forgiveness. It works as a perfectly pitched entreaty of outreach, akin to – and perhaps inspired by – Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water". Another possible touchstone is Kris Kristofferson's "Me And Bobby McGee", with which it shares a baleful conception of freedom as a nihilistic illusion ("*Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose*" versus "*Freedom, it's just some people talking*"). It is pretty clear that Henley sings "Desperado" as a memo to its own narrator, who is clearly the glass-half-empty type ("*It seems to me some fine things have been laid upon your table/ But you only want the ones that you can't get*"). At heart, "Desperado" is – like Henley's later solo hit "Boys Of Summer" – a song about getting old, lonely and frightened.

"Desperado" began its journey to standard status with Linda Ronstadt's version on her 1973 album *Don't Cry Now*. Not long subsequently, The Carpenters had a crack at it, and it was a country hit for Johnny Rodriguez in 1977. The Eagles themselves snuck it onto their 1976 *Greatest Hits* album, though it hadn't been a hit, or widely regarded as great. Since then, it has been covered, for better and for worse, by Kenny Rogers, George Michael, Neil Diamond, Clint Black, Westlife, Diana Krall and Molly Hatchet, among many others. The definitive reading is Johnny Cash's sparse, solemn take on 2002's *American IV*, Cash inhabiting it as a reckoning with a life almost over, a man learning the song's lessons too late (Henley provided backing vocals: it can only be hoped he was happier with this performance, because he should be).

THERE were two singles released from *Desperado*, neither of which made much impact. Where "Tequila Sunrise" is concerned, it's not difficult to understand why it was overlooked. While sweet enough, it's slight, a little too easy of listening for its own good, and it forms part of the case often made against the Eagles that they succeeded by diluting more potent country fare to make it sufficiently palatable for mainstream rock audiences. In this specific instance, the watered-down moonshine of "Tequila Sunrise" – another parable of a lonesome drifter – is readily imaginable as the consequences of an experiment to see what happens when you remove everything interesting from Townes Van Zandt's "Pancho & Lefty".

The second single, "Outlaw Man", was written by David Blue, a New York songwriter and contemporary of Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton and Bob Dylan. Blue's original – produced by Graham Nash – had something of the arched-eyebrow pastiche about it, trowelling the schtick on ironically thick ("*In one hand I've a bible/In the other I've got a gun*", etcetera). The Eagles played "Outlaw Man" a great deal straighter. Glenn Frey delivers the lead vocal from way back in the mix, as if



Best western: the Eagles get into the outlaw spirit for the *Desperado* cover shoot

HENRY DILTZ

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"The Eagles are currently producing the finest music ever to emerge from the country rock school, possibly excepting that of The Band... This is an album of exceptionally beautiful songs, sung, played, arranged and produced with an exquisite blend of technical precision and emotional involvement."
CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, MAY 26, 1973

"I have a feeling that this album is going to be hanging over the heads of Eagles for a long time, for like Pete Townshend's *Tommy*, this is a masterly concept album that works.... Like their first album there's a great deal of work gone into the songs on all levels."
MARK PLUMMER, MM, JUNE 2, 1973

haunting the song rather than singing it – and removes the reference to a "*'56 Chevrolet*", such vehicles being an anachronism to the milieu the Eagles were attempting to resurrect. Although, if we're getting picky, so are Allman Brothers-style shifts from swampy boogie to breezy country rock wig-outs, such as the Eagles execute here.

Any pretence at matching the musical stylings to the historical settings is completely – and gloriously – abandoned on "Out Of Control", a three-chord, 12-bar electric stomper written by Henley, Frey and Tommy Nixon. "Out Of Control" is a giddy three-minute repudiation of another charge often brought against the Eagles, essentially that they were a rock band who could not rock, and there is not another moment in their canon in which they sound like they're having quite so much fun as this. Nearly a third of the song is consumed by a daft, wilfully overcooked finish of powerchords and drum rolls; before collapsing into this chaotic climax, "Out Of Control" struts and swaggers with the leering braggadocio of anything on more revered southern rock touchstones such as the debut albums of Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Marshall Tucker Band, both of which appeared the same year as *Desperado*.

That said, there are moments on *Desperado* which – give or take the Eagles' pristine harmonies and Johns' polished production – could plausibly have been belted out by the house band in some 19th-century swinging-door saloon as the Dalton brothers bundled their rivals through the window and into the horse trough while firing their Colts into the chandeliers. Bernie Leadon's "Twenty-One" is orthodox bluegrass, its title a nod to the age reached by Emmett Dalton when the gang misjudged the Coffeyville job (he survived 23 gunshot wounds on the day and 14 subsequent years in prison, and lived until 1937). The song's buoyant, jaunty plucking is a beautifully wrought backdrop for Leadon's depiction of a young man radiating a young man's wondrous, boundless, ignorant confidence ("*I've got not cause to be afraid/Or fear that life will ever fade*").

It is unsurprising that Leadon's compositions feel most at home on an album with the preoccupations of *Desperado*. Leadon had the most straightforward country background of any of the Eagles, having arrived via Dillard & Clark and The Flying Burrito Brothers, packing along with his guitar his banjo, mandolin, dobro and pedal steel. These had been sparingly deployed on *Eagles*, but were brought dramatically forward on *Desperado*. Leadon's "Bitter Creek" perhaps overdoes the trippy languor somewhat, but demonstrates that Leadon was paying attention while he watched Gene Clark at work, or possibly the other way around – "Bitter Creek" would have fit snugly on Clark's solo masterpiece *No Other*, released the following year. "Bitter Creek" is a deft western ballad with slight psychedelic undertones, the Eagles' harmonies a desert wind, the tambourines playing rattlesnakes.

This was the LP where Frey and Henley began a fruitful songwriting partnership

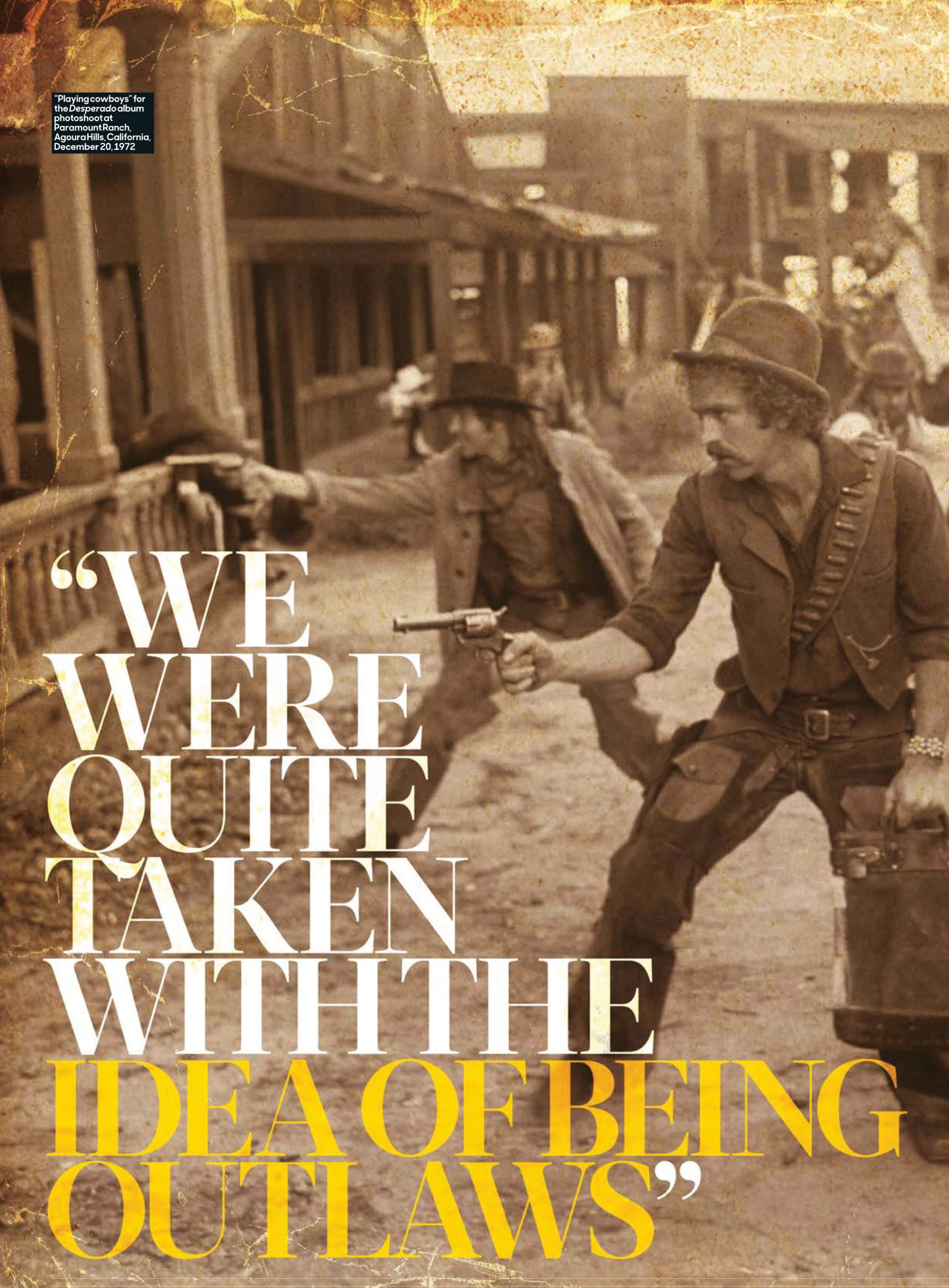
Desperado was the album on which Frey and Henley would begin a fruitful songwriting partnership that would come to dominate the band, but the two songs co-written by Randy Meisner are the ones least likely to have caused panicked hyper-ventilation at the Eagles' record company upon their first listen through the album. "Saturday Night" and "Certain Kind Of Fool" are both the kind of thing which might have been wanted or expected by listeners beguiled by "Take It Easy" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling" – what would become the Eagles' trademark of high-gloss country rock. "Saturday Night" is a ballad of longing and regret which probably could have fit onto any Eagles album – give or take a passing reference to a railroad, the cowboy motif lies dormant.

"Certain Kind Of Fool", however, is the song that best knots together the outlaw/rock star conceit. Meisner's protagonist is a poor boy with wide eyes and big ideas, who spots an implement in a store window which he perceives as "*the mark of a new kind of man*". Furthermore, "*He kinda liked the feeling, so shiny and smooth in his hand*". And so, "*He took it to the country, and practised for days without rest/And then one day he felt it, he knew he could stand with the best*". The consequences are as regrettable as they are predictable: "*A poster on a storefront, a picture of a wanted man*". At no point does the song specify whether it was a gun or a guitar which proved the accessory to a young man's self-destruction – both, clearly, can get you into trouble.

SLEEVE NOTES DESPERADO

1 Doolin'-Dalton ★★★
2 Twenty-One ★★★★
3 Out Of Control ★★★★
4 Tequila Sunrise ★★★
5 Desperado ★★★★★
6 Certain Kind Of Fool ★★★
7 Doolin'-Dalton (instrumental) ★★★
8 Outlaw Man ★★★
9 Saturday Night ★★★
10 Bitter Creek ★★★
11 Doolin'-Dalton/Desperado (reprise) ★★★

LABEL: Asylum
PRODUCED BY: Glyn Johns
RECORDED AT: Island Studios, London
PERSONNEL: Glenn Frey (guitars, vocals, keyboards, harmonica), Bernie Leadon (guitars, vocals, banjo, mandolin, dobro), Randy Meisner (bass, vocals), Don Henley (drums, vocals, guitar), Jim Ed Norman (piano)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 39; US 41



"Playing cowboys" for the *Desperado* album photoshoot at Paramount Ranch, Agoura Hills, California, December 20, 1972

"WE WERE QUITE TAKEN WITH THE IDEA OF BEING OUTLAWS"

EAGLES
ARCHIVE 2013

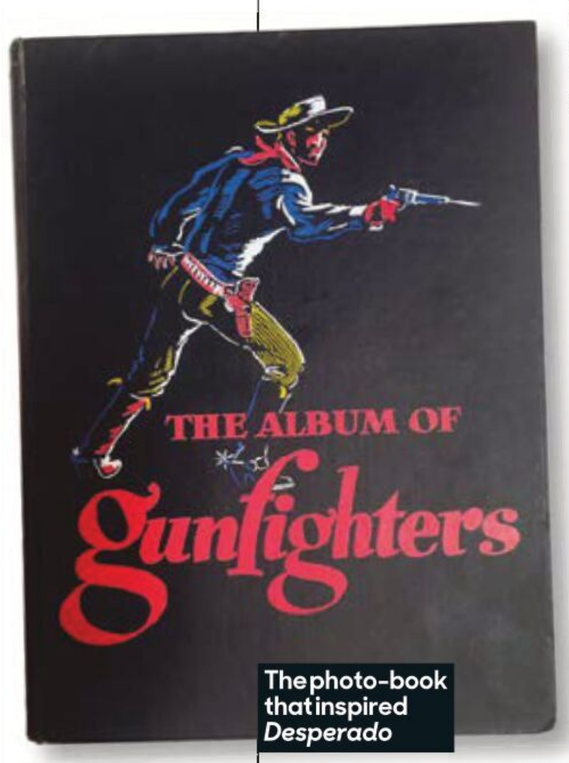
1973. THE EAGLES are a ruthlessly ambitious band – "a benevolent dictatorship" – on the verge of superstardom. Why, then, do they make a "fucking cowboy record" in wild west London? Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2013, the band, JACKSON BROWNE and JD SOUTHER unravel the thinking behind *Desperado*. "We've had the hits, now we want acceptance as serious artists," learns GRAEME THOMSON

HENRY DILTZ

UNCUT JUNE 2013

SOME 80 years after Bob Dalton met his bloody end during a shoot-out in smalltown Kansas, a book is being passed around a $60-a-month apartment in Echo Park, the low-rent Los Angeles locale where Glenn Frey, Jackson Browne and JD Souther live, write, drink, smoke and plot their futures.

The Album Of Gunfighters by J Marvin Hunter and Hoan H Rose contains photographs and brief biographies of the outlaws, bandits and bounty hunters of the Old West. Among the usual suspects – Jesse James, Billy the Kid, John Wesley Hardin – are the Dalton Gang, a band of train robbers from the early 1890s. Rootless and reckless, the Daltons lived outside conventional rules and were rarely seen until they blew into town, grabbed the spoils and split again. To the young musicians in Echo Park, hugely ambitious yet by no means immune to romance, certain parallels start to become apparent.



The photo-book that inspired *Desperado*

"We were quite taken with the idea of being, or at least portraying, outlaws," says Souther. "It was a serviceable metaphor for our story." Alongside Browne, Souther was one of two honorary Eagles who would shortly co-write "Doolin-Dalton", the lead song on the band's second album. Although some of the participants now express reservations about the premise – "Generally, I thought there were limitations to the metaphor of musicians as gunslingers!" Browne tells *Uncut* – the framing device for the songs on *Desperado* had personal resonance for the Eagles. Frey was from Michigan, Don Henley from Texas. Bernie Leadon hailed from Minnesota and Randy Meisner from Nebraska. Like generations of Americans before them, including the Dalton Gang, they had each headed west in search of glory. "All of us went out west," says Leadon. "People would go to LA and fail, and the responsible ones would move back home and start a family, while the malcontent 'never say die'-type personalities said, 'No, I'm staying!' That was our story. The idea was: 'How are we feeling about our lives and what we're doing, and would the people in a gang have felt the same way?' Breaking out of societal expectations and doing something extraordinary. We were just kids, but we were looking at our lives and trying to make reasonable comment about it."

The result was an ambitious song-cycle that sold poorly, had no hits and was slated by their label as a "fucking cowboy record". But the LP made the Eagles more than just another country-rock band. It made them mythic.

THE Eagles always had a complicated dynamic. They were less a one-for-all gang of musketeers, more individual sharpshooters who formed an affiliation to pull off the biggest job of their lives. Frey and Don Henley were friends who left Linda Ronstadt's backing band to form their own group. They recruited Leadon, a guitarist, banjo player and baritone singer formerly of Dillard & Clark and the Burritos, and Meisner, ex-Poco bassist and a gifted tenor. Meisner and Leadon were the more experienced and country-leaning, and perhaps the most accomplished musicians; Frey and Henley had the most forceful personalities and, in time, the most persuasive songs. It was never a sentimental attachment. "When we got together we defined our business plan: we wanted to be successful, world famous, acclaimed and rich," says Leadon. "One of the first things Frey said was, 'OK, let's keep this simple. No Christmas cards.' Did we go on holiday and call each other? No."

Although never members of the band, Souther and Browne were integral parts of the Eagles' creative family. Frey and Souther shared a one-room apartment at 1020 Laguna Avenue; Browne lived downstairs, where he wrote "Take It Easy", the song that gave the band a major hit with their very first single. "Even when JD and Jackson weren't directly involved in the songwriting they were involved in dialogue and ideas," says Ron Stone, then a senior member of David Geffen and Elliot Roberts' management company. "It raised the threshold for songwriting very high. Every word and melody counted. It wasn't a casual enterprise."

Taken from their eponymous debut album, released on Asylum in June 1972, "Take It Easy" and its follow-up, "Witchy Woman", were both sizeable hits. "There was all this success and then – whammo – we were due back in the studio," says Leadon. "Frey said at the time, 'We've had the hits, now what we want is critical acceptance as serious artists. We'll do that with this album.'"

The album-orientated premise found a focus, says Browne, with "the book I'd been given about gunfighters of the Old West. I showed it to the guys, and I think it was Glenn who started singing, *'They were Doolin, Doolin and Dalton...'*"

Souther recalls it slightly differently: "Truthfully, the seeds of the beginning sequence are hazy now, but the first picture my memory can dredge up is Jackson singing the first verse [*of 'Doolin-Dalton'*] at a rehearsal in Hollywood and it making me smile."

The other key foundation song was "Desperado", a tough-but-tender ballad primarily written by Henley that became the album's emotional anchor point and, according to Browne, was "really the seed of the whole thing". At this point, Leadon recalls that "Glenn sat everybody down and mapped out which characters in the gang could have songs written about them, or encouraged us to write songs about this concept. It's a little bit of a thin premise, the outlaw gang compared to the

THE ASYLUM YEARS

"If you want Neil Young, you're taking the Eagles!"

ASYLUM RECORDS was formed in 1971 by David Geffen and Elliot Roberts as an outlet for Jackson Browne, who was signed to the pair's management company but couldn't get a record deal. The connection with Browne eased the Eagles' path to the label, which quickly became a boutique sanctuary for the cream of the Laurel Canyon scene, including Linda Ronstadt, Joni Mitchell, Judee Sill and Tom Waits. Geffen's management roster, which included Neil Young and Crosby, Stills & Nash, gave him real clout as a label boss in the early days. "Geffen had a huge amount to do with the fact that our first record did as well as it did," says Leadon. "He kind of launched Asylum with us – he really pushed the first record. He was a tough customer. I recall him screaming at a promoter, 'If you want Neil Young, then you're taking the Eagles!' It meant we got a headlining tour. That kind of leverage was invaluable." Merging with Elektra in 1972, Asylum was briefly home to Dylan, releasing *Planet Waves* and *Before The Flood* during his hiatus from Columbia. Geffen left shortly afterwards and the label has since gone through various permutations. Revived in 2004, the current roster includes Cardi B and Ed Sheeran.

'Fro back: David Geffen in London, July 20, 1972

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

"It removed any distractions": a suitably focused Eagles pose in London in 1973

modern rock'n'roll band, but then so are most Hollywood movies..."

The rest of the material came quickly. The only non-original song on the record, "Outlaw Man", was written by David Blue, who was signed to Geffen and Roberts' management roster. "He was in the office almost every day," says Leadon. "I think Frey picked up on it." Blue's song fit the premise perfectly, but in fact much of *Desperado*'s conceptual unity relies on the power of suggestion. "It told a story if you wanted it to, and it didn't really matter if you didn't, because the songs were strong enough to hold up on their own," according to its producer, Glyn Johns.

Leadon wrote the lowering "Bitter Creek" after Dalton gangster George "Bitter Creek" Newcomb, although it only references outlaw exploits in its final verse. His other song on the record, "Twenty-One" – "a silly banjo song about youthful optimism" according to its author – captures the excitement of being "*young and fast*", full of bravado and intent on grabbing what the world has to offer. The hard-rocking "Out Of Control" is fuelled by the same reckless energy, familiar to most touring musicians, but "Tequila Sunrise" describes the flipside, the "*hollow feelin'*" of the itinerant life. "Saturday Night" is similarly downbeat, a slow, nostalgic waltz lamenting the end of innocence

"It told a story if you wanted it, but the songs were strong enough to hold up on their own"

GLYN JOHNS

and the lack of a tender touch. None of these songs are explicitly tied to the concept, but spun around "Doolin-Dalton", "Desperado" and "Outlaw Man", and suffused with the atmosphere of the open plains and a tough, peculiarly male kind of loneliness, they easily trick the listener into believing they are.

Desperado may have been intended, as cover photographer Henry Diltz puts it, to be about "young adventurous dudes living by their talents and wits, seeking their fortunes and looking for ladies", but it is, ultimately, an album of shadows, moral ambivalence and cold morning-afters. After all, they knew how the story ended: *The Album Of Gunfighters* offered graphic illustrations of renegades after they had been caught by the law. "It was filled with pictures of recently captured and killed late-19th-century outlaws, including the Dalton gang," says Souther, who took the book along to the cover shoot [*see panel on next page*]. On the back of the album the band, alongside Browne and Souther, lie dead and bound, while above them stand a vengeful posse consisting of, among others, Glyn Johns, manager John Hartmann and road manager Tommy Nixon. The inference was clear. "Oh yeah," says Browne. "The whole thing really comes together in that shot on the back where all the musicians are lying there dead!"

One of the last songs written, mostly by Meisner, "Certain Kind Of Fool" explored the mindset behind the "*crazy kid*" driven towards pursuing an extraordinary life. The protagonist who "*had a reputation spreading like fire through the land*" could be either a bandit or a virtuoso. "The idea of musicians as outlaws was never intended by me to be the whole metaphor," says Browne. "It was more something you could hint at, and the song on that album that does that best is 'Certain Kind Of Fool'. It could be about a gun, it could be about a guitar, and it's not really about cowboys at all. There's no western motif." It is also in many ways an eerie premonition of what would happen to the Eagles after success spun them around. "*It wasn't for the money*", sings Meisner plaintively. "*At least, it didn't start that way...*"

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

Close ties: JD Souther and Jackson Browne (left) join the Eagles' fun at Paramount Ranch, Agoura Hills, California, December 20, 1972

EAGLES had been recorded at Olympic Studios in London with Glyn Johns in February 1972. Eight months later they were back, again with Johns, this time recording at Island Records' studio in Basing Street. The four adopted Californians, singing country-rock and hymning the dusty myths of the Old West, arrived in a city in thrall to Bolan and Bowie. The culture clash was one to relish. The label found them flats on the King's Road and they would travel by cab back and forth to the studio. At night they visited the local pubs, or occasionally stayed with Johns and his family in Epsom, driving around the country roads in the producer's giant Lincoln Continental. "We all loved being in England," says Leadon. "It was still a nation of shopkeepers then, so we'd go to the greengrocers, the tobacconist, we had a little cash and our needs were met. Our biggest problem was that Marlboro cigarettes didn't taste the same. They weren't toasted!" The other major point of cultural contention was the temperature.

"They adapted to London very well," says Johns. "To get them out of their own comfort zone was good, it removed any distractions, but really, we could have made *Desperado* on the moon, it wouldn't have made any difference. You didn't need to be sitting in the middle of the desert with a horse tied up outside." Nevertheless, Ron Stone believes being so far from home gave the performances an extra layer of poignancy. "They longed for Southern California, and the album has that wistfulness," he says. "Not being in that place helped them. Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

The album took four weeks and cost £30,000. It was disciplined work, the band working weekday office hours, from late morning until 6pm. Johns wouldn't tolerate any "hanky-panky" in the studio, something which Frey in particular resented, later comparing the producer to an over-officious school ma'am. The band's drug use "increased with time", admits Leadon, but during *Desperado* it was "self-regulating. We didn't have much money, we were all quite well behaved, and Glyn was very good at keeping us focused. He was a no-nonsense kind of guy: no substances in the studio – you'll breathe air! Tea was the permissible stimulant."

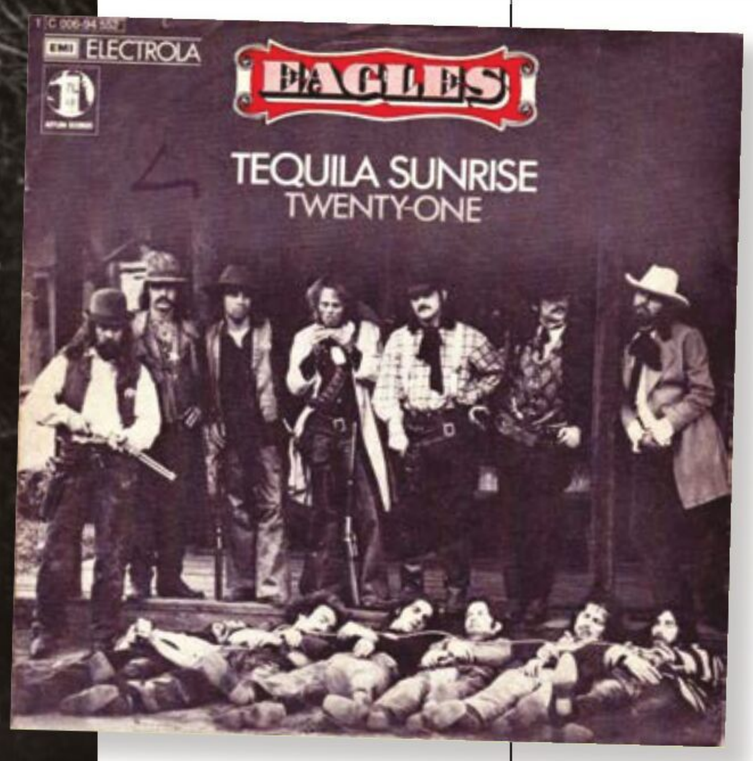
Johns remembers them as "very professional,

"GUN SMOKE WAS RISING ABOVE THE RANCH..."

Henry Diltz recalls the *Desperado* cover shoot

"FIRST, art director Gary Burden took the group down to Western Costume, a Hollywood movie costume company, to pick their favourite cowboy clothes from among those worn by John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart and Lee Marvin. Loaded with ammunition and beer, on December 18, 1972 we all went to an abandoned movie lot in the Agoura Hills Paramount Ranch. The day was mostly one of playing cowboys. There were gun shots, shouting and laughter. So much gun smoke was rising that fire engines arrived. There was a feel of reality and history to it all. JD Souther had a book of Old West outlaws, and in it was a photo of a posse with dead outlaws lying in a row like dead coyotes. We set up a posed photo just like the book, and that's what appeared on the back of the LP. The package was planned as a fold-open with a double spread inside of the gunfight. You'd have the four Eagles on the cover, the gunfight inside, dead outlaws on the back. David Geffen decided to go for a single sleeve. Good for business, not for art!"

HENRY DILTZ



> **"They wanted it to be an organic band. What they realised is that rock'n'roll is a benevolent dictatorship"**
>
> **RON STONE**

On *Desperado*, the pair had a hand in writing eight of the ten originals, and shared writing credits on the two most high- profile tracks – "Tequila Sunrise" and "Desperado". It was the start of the Eagles' musical output beginning to reflect both the band hierarchy and also the manner in which it had been formed in the first place. "There was a degree of prefabrication to the Eagles," says Stone. "We put them all together, with Glenn and Don as the centrepieces, but they wanted it to be a real, organic band. That's the emotional component of the first two records: to be a proper band, almost playing at being a democracy. What they realised as time went on is that rock'n'roll is a benevolent dictatorship."

Leadon, perhaps surprisingly, agrees: "They were more suited to lead. It was actually Glyn's idea to make it more of a four-way thing. The natural dynamic was more like a Beatles vibe, with two main guys, but Glyn pushed hard to make sure Randy and I had two songs each on *Desperado*, and it worked out OK." While both Leadon and Stone believe the friction and creative tension was a positive force initially, it quickly became a problem. Shortly into the recording of their third record, *On The Border*, they sacked Johns. "We fell out, really," he says. "Henley and Frey treated the others like inferior beings – particularly Frey. I didn't like what I was seeing at all and I made that fairly obvious." Don Felder came in on extra guitar and the sound toughened. Not much later Leadon left, then Meisner. "Democracy does not serve the creative impulse well," shrugs Browne. "In the end, Don and Glenn just took over the band."

very together". The songs were written, the concept nailed down, even the running order agreed, before they set foot in the studio. The producer's most obvious contribution was inserting an instrumental version of "Doolin-Dalton" and adding elegiac codas of that song and "Desperado" to enhance the idea of a narrative arc. The only big production flourish was adding strings to the title track, a task for which Henley's friend Jim Ed Norman was flown over to conduct members of the London Philharmonic. "I was standing in the studio listening to the playback, and it was just astonishing when those strings swell up under the second half of the song," says Leadon. Even Johns was taken aback. "I didn't realise 'Desperado' would turn out as well as it did, in the delivery from Henley and the string arrangement. The strings I hadn't envisaged, I'm sure that was their idea."

It was perhaps the last Eagles album of which it could be said that it was fun to make. "We were all really thrilled with it," says Johns. "In fact, when they finished the record they were over the moon – they carried me on their shoulders out of the bloody control room! They were thrilled to bits."

Nevertheless, changes were taking place in the band dynamic. Having worked with them mere months before on their debut, and as a producer who was firmly committed to the Eagles being an equilibrium where "no-one feels left out and is fairly represented", Johns noticed a clear shift in the power base. "Henley and Frey assumed control during *Desperado*, is the best way of putting it," he says. "That feeling was always there, but stronger on the second LP."

BACK in the late winter of '72, returning to California with their new record, the Eagles began to experience misgivings. "Back home, the paranoia would begin," says Leadon. "Second guessing everything: 'Oh my God, it doesn't sound like everyone else. The songs suck. We suck. We need to redo it.'" It was left to Johns, who flew over before Christmas to take part in the cover shoot, to talk them down. "Glyn was fabulous, truly what we needed at the time. He said, 'You're wrong. You don't know, but I know. I'm right, shut up!' And he was."

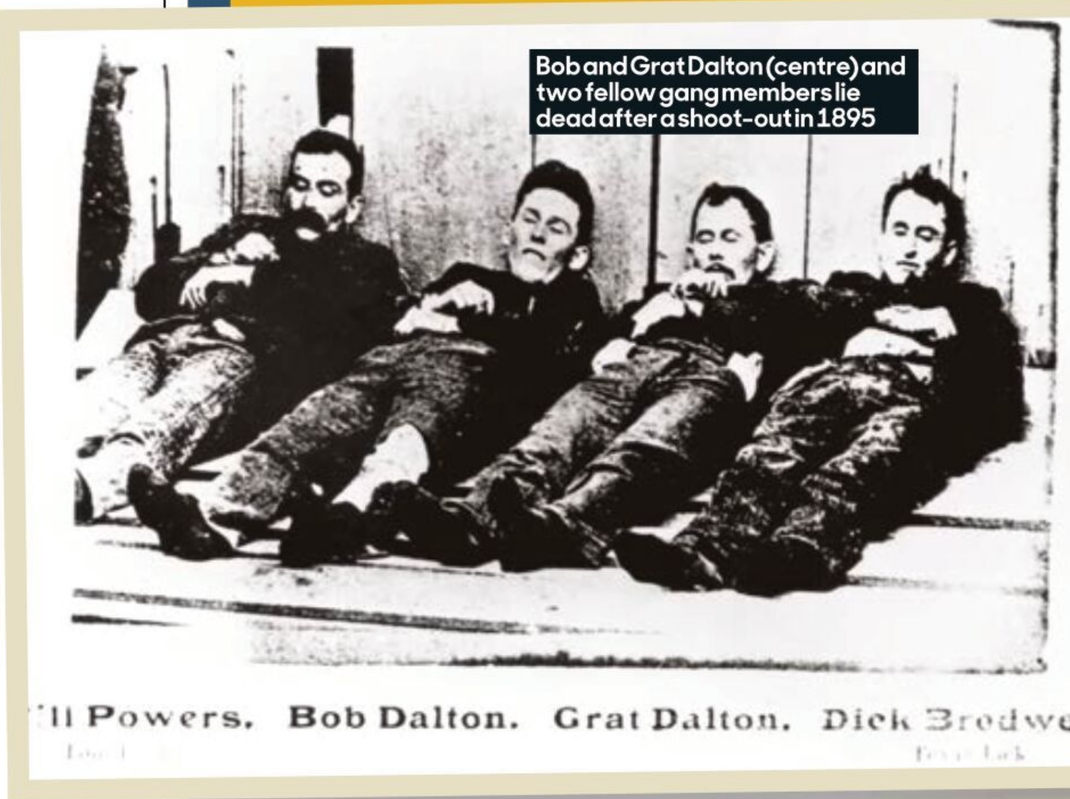
Time may have proved him correct, but the initial impact of *Desperado* when it was released in April 1973 seemed to confirm the band's concerns. There were no hit singles, critically and commercially the response was lukewarm, while "everybody at the record company was horrified", says Stone. "Like, 'What are we going to do with this?' It was a big disappointment, but creatively it was such a leap, such an ambitious thing to do, not to sit on your success but to push the envelope. Now, when you look back across their work it doesn't seem like such a radical thing to do, but at the time it was a left turn without signalling."

Browne agrees. "*Desperado* was a brilliant move, because it gave the Eagles an identity. There was something limited about the concept, but it was also very potent. There was a nouveau-Indian hippy thing going on, everyone was coming to California, and in the end that was what they were writing about: that projected dream of what freedom could be. Vacate your assigned positions in life and be what you fucking want!"

"THEY WERE DOOLIN, DOOLIN AND DALTON"

The men behind the song...

GRAT, Bob and Emmett Dalton were Oklahoma lawmen turned train robbers whose gang included George "Bitter Creek" Newcomb and Bill Doolin. Their most celebrated crime, recalled in "Doolin-Dalton", was an audacious attempt to rob two banks in Coffeyville, Kansas, simultaneously on October 5, 1892, an attempt to "beat anything Jesse James ever did – rob two banks at once, in broad daylight". Their raids on CM Condon & Co and the First National Bank ended in a shoot-out that left Bob and Grat dead alongside two other gang members. Emmett received 23 gunshot wounds but survived. Jailed for 14 years, he died, aged 66, in 1937. After the Dalton Gang combusted, Bill Doolin formed an alliance with a fourth Dalton brother, William. It's the partnership between these two Bills that largely inspired "Doolin-Dalton". Originally calling themselves the Doolin Dalton Gang, they later became The Wild Bunch.



Bob and Grat Dalton (centre) and two fellow gang members lie dead after a shoot-out in 1895

ALAIN BENAINOUS/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

"THINGS JUST HAD TO HAPPEN"

In London, the EAGLES meet the music press to offer their opinion on glam rock ("burlesque") and to doff a cap to their producer, Glyn Johns ("the hardest-working man I've ever met"). Also in for praise is their home scene and its prime mover, Linda Ronstadt ("all of us played with her at some time or other…"). Later in the year, Linda herself visits London. "The age of girl singers is about to come," she says.

Sweet harmony: on the *Pop Gala* TV show, Voorburg, Netherlands March 10, 1973

MELODY MAKER MARCH 3, 1973

IT'S a rare trip. You hear a band and turn on to their music straight off. Warm and refreshing or hard-driving, straight down the line rock and roll. The music's biting hard and filters into the bloodstream.

First time I heard the Eagles it was like that. I popped their album on the turntable, listened to a couple of bars and was totally immersed in the songs. And it was the songs that caught me before their own unique, relaxed country-rock style brought a new awareness. The songs on the debut album are so strong, each one played and recorded with a feeling of a love and care.

In the States, Eagles are home and dry, their album's been a constant seller since it was released around the middle of last year and in the singles market it's had good mileage. Two Top 10 singles and another, "Peaceful Easy Feeling", just working its way into the Top 20.

Yet here they don't mean a light. The name got around to a few people, the buzz went through the music business when their first album was released, but there was little action.

But by the time they've played two concerts here next month at the Royal Festival Hall, London, and the Hard Rock in Manchester there'll be enough of a buzz for their name to stick. At the moment they're in Britain, living in a series of service flats just off the King's Road, while they record their second album at Island studios.

Eagles are LA people; it was the catalyst that drew them together. Musically they ended up there after their own areas had run out of experiences, a dragnet that allowed some of the finest American musicians to get together and bounce off one another. New York gave out driving rock and roll and its current bizarre side effects, while in the sunshine LA took away the tensions and gave us relaxed country-flavoured rock.

Linda Ronstadt brought the Eagles together. All the band had worked backing her at one time or another.

Drummer-vocalist Don Henley, who went to California from Texas with his band Shiloh which included Al Perkins, now with Manassas, and vocalist-slide guitarist Glenn Frey worked with Linda two years ago. They talked about putting a band together and met bass player Randy Meisner, who was in the original Poco, when he filled in for Linda's bass player who couldn't make a gig in San Francisco.

Don and Glenn stayed with Linda a while, dreaming of getting a band together. Randy split Poco and joined up with Rick Nelson's Stone Canyon Band, a gig that made him quit music for

eight months until Eagles came along.

Circumstance threw the three of them together, they decided on forming a group and at just the right time Bernie Leadon split from the Flying Burrito Brothers.

"We all knew each other simply because we'd all been playing in the LA music scene," said Glenn Frey.

"There must be a pool of about 50 musicians in LA that gravitate between the pure bluegrass music and country pop/rock. There's all kinds of people in LA that play music and we got to know one another's music through that scene.

"All of us had played with Linda as part of her band at one time or another. Bernie had played with her three-and-a-half years ago before he joined the Burrito Brothers. Don and I were playing with her when we got together with Randy, and when we heard Bernie was leaving the Burritos we called him up and asked him to have a play with us."

"In LA you can't help but be affected by people you meet, like Jackson Browne"

GLENN FREY

RANDY: "It was real nice the way the band came together. It was like things just had to happen."
GLENN: "Putting a band together is real easy because we were all doing other gigs and meeting people. But finding a band with all the right people who have the ability to shine is another matter. A real band is always growing together and getting each other to play better."

Eagles have something really positive in their songs, and in their sound which is tight four voice harmonies and constructive arrangements. Also with four singers there are four lead voices which add a whole new edge to their music. But it is the song consciousness, as Glenn puts it, that is so important with the band. That's why from the first album they were able to get three hit singles out of ten songs.

"It wasn't a planned move that we would record an album full of singles. But we did set out to put 10 good songs on every album instead of having fillers, where one song is the single because it's so obviously a better song than any other on the album.

Surely you get song-conscious," added Glenn. "In LA, you cannot help but be influenced and affected on some level by the people you meet, like Jackson Browne. The people in The Byrds and Buffalo Springfield above all else were good songwriters.

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

"Songs are so important. It's like loud rock'n'roll has been done at its best; anything else is a poor relation. It's like long guitar solos when I hear them are a poor excuse compared to the things that have gone down before from Clapton and Hendrix. But then it's like are people trying to get better at writing songs or are they just copping a trip?"

"All musicians," says Glenn, "tend to confine what they see going on to their own music style. The ultimate in theatre for me was watching Neil Young walk on stage at Carnegie Hall in work boots and denims and the audience just coming to a complete hush. Neil can make that magic work every night. To me that's the get-off, that's not just getting real crazy."

DON: "Don't think we're opposed to theatrics, but when you can't play and have to rely on weird clothes, makeup and stuff then that's not valid to me. If you're a good musician, wear what you like, but it seems at the moment there's an awful lot of bands who need all the freakiness to get by.

"It seems that for bands like Alice Cooper and The Sweet the music is secondary to the theatre trip. They try to bash everybody with the body first. For us the music comes first."

"Alice can do what he likes," says Randy "but don't he step on baby chickens? Is that rock and roll?"

DON: "No, man, that's burlesque."

It sounds like sour grapes. In fact that couldn't be further from the truth. There's no malice as they talk about other bands. They can't figure it, but then maybe the other bands can't figure them.

The new album, unlike the first, has a concept running through it. The thread that ties the songs together being an outlaw gang in the Old West – the Doolin Dalton gang who cleaned up around Kansas in the 1890s. It draws parallels between outlaws and rock and rollers. Both basically are the same is the conclusion. Both living outside the laws of normality.

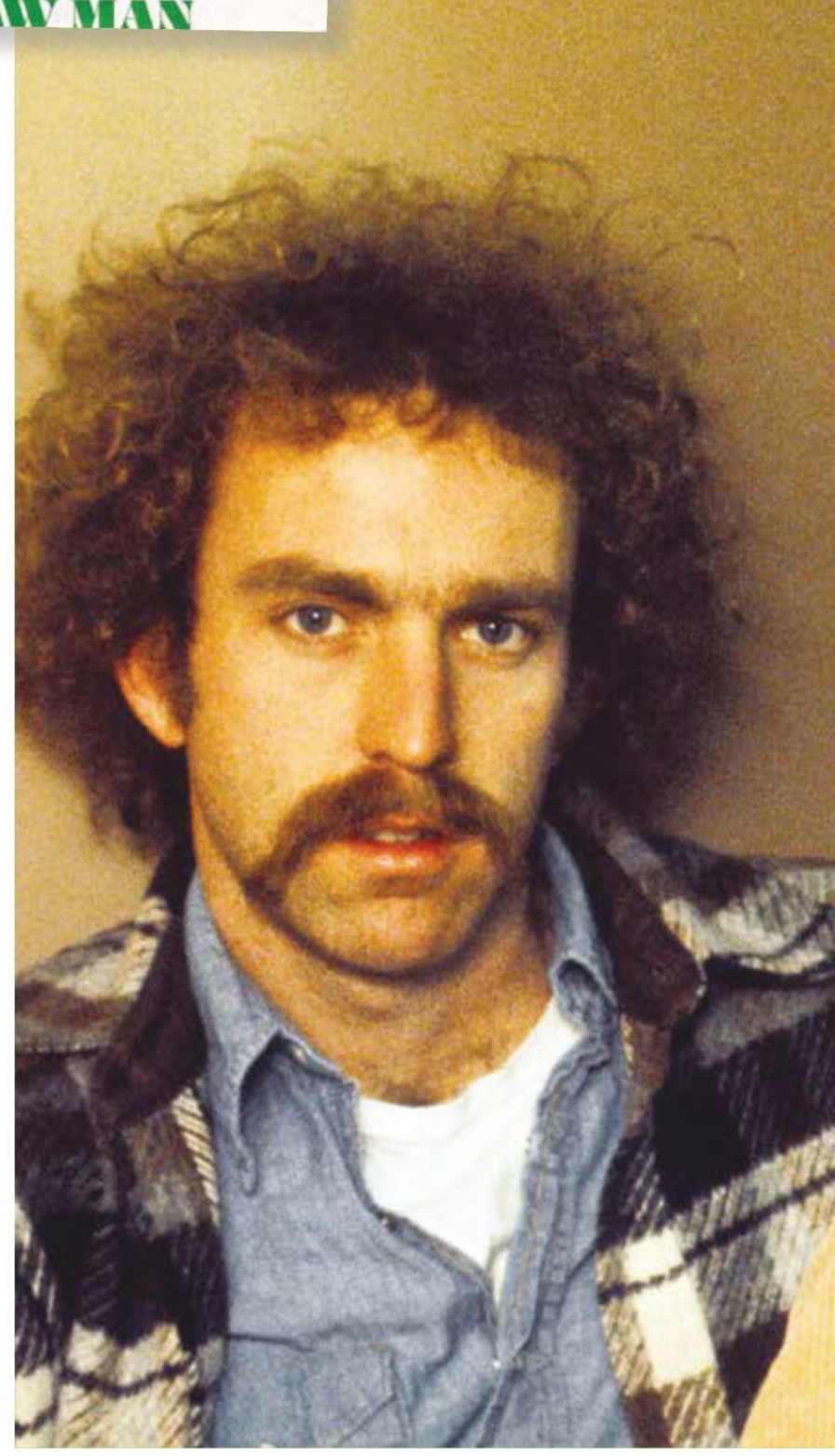
The basic story is that of an outlaw's life told in flashbacks. His discovery of a gun (or guitar) in a shop window, becoming a man, getting drunk for the first time, fighting over an unfaithful woman, making easy money and the final big job (or album), before the final burning. Nothing left.

But Eagles have a lot left to do before the final job. Looking much like an outlaw himself and prime for a movie part, Glenn Frey says they'll be working a lot yet. "While the going's easy," he says, "you can't stop."

MARK PLUMMER

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

Working party: the Eagles rehearse in London in 1973



NME MARCH 10, 1973

IN a comfortable Chelsea flat, Texan Glenn Frey is looking a bit depressed as he sits surrounded by a pile of the latest rock albums laid on for him by an EMI press officer.

"None of this crap has done me any good," he says with a Southern cow-poke tongue. A bit hesitantly, that same press officer has returned with a couple of albums Frey's requested.

He looks and grins from ear to ear, exclaiming: "Merle Haggard, my main man."

Frey plays guitar for a band called the Eagles who, since their first album was released nearly a year ago, have become one of America's hottest new groups.

As well as the chart success of their debut album, Eagles' three singles were taken from it and went into the US Top 10. "Take It Easy", their first 45, turned out to be thesummer song of last year, and in every state you can think of hips were slowly struttin' to the carefree rhythm.

This was especially true in California, the group's home territory, where "Take It Easy" became a part of the summer alongside the mainstays: Coppertone, Coca-Cola, bikinis and the blue Pacific.

It was as significant as any of the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean surf tunes which had reigned supreme a decade before. Then came a harder "Witchy Woman", followed by the softer "Peaceful Easy Feeling", which is currently hitting its peak Stateside.

All of this over-the-counter action has led to the Eagles being nominated as Best New Act for a Grammy award, the music business's equivalent to an Oscar.

So far, however, their success has been almost solely restricted to America. They believe their failure in other countries is due to the group's lack of exposure, a misfortune which should be corrected by the group's current British dates.

BEFORE going out on their own, the Eagles had each played in Linda Ronstadt's band (though not all at the same time) and had gone through the usual mill of musical chairs. Through a series of coincidences and mishaps, the Eagles were born in Los Angeles during 1971.

"We knew each other mainly as musicians for a couple of years," says Bernie Leadon. "Everybody in LA tends to hang out together.

"We wanted to make people happy": Leadon, Frey, Meisner and Henley in London, 1973

No deals were discussed and no record thing was set up, it was all very loose. We just played and talked about what we wanted to do and how to do it.

"Linda's manager, John Boylan, helped us a lot in the beginning. He's the one who suggested we go with [*David*] Geffen. Geffen was the best guy to be with 'cause he's the richest and youngest too. And on top of that, he was handing out the most artistic freedom.

"We wanted to be a band which could work anywhere and make people happy and enjoy ourselves at the same time. We worked up a bunch of tunes, including other people's songs, that the crowd could dance to.

"And instead of being a Hollywood band programmed to make records and that trip, we went to the local boogie bar in Aspen, Colorado [*a ski resort*] and worked four sets a night, six nights a week.

"Although we'd all done it before separately, we knew we had to do it all over again. We just boogied and had a great time and, in about four months, we were ready to cut."

"Glyn controls the sound like one of us would play our instrument. He's like a fifth member"

BERNIE LEADON

On their debut album, the Eagles worked with one of Britain's most accomplished producers, Glyn Johns. It's very rare that a new act can attract such talent as Johns, but the admiration was mutual.

"Each one of us has a lot of respect for various engineers, but Glyn controls the sound like one of us would play our instrument.

"We were also looking for a guy who was super-experienced and could help direct all of us. A really important factor was that Glyn was an engineer and producer too. There's only a few people like that.

"He's one of the hardest-working people I've ever met in my life. When we record, he's like a fifth member of the group."

IN FACT, the first time I met the group was just over a year ago when they were over here recording at Olympic studio with Johns. They were staying in a couple of cramped flats in Maida Vale when we discussed how disoriented the group was by the English weather.

At the studio, the group worked long and hard with GJ to get the results they wanted. And when the album was released, I was surprised that they had retained such a California, summery sound – when recording had been done in February in London.

Meanwhile, the Eagles have just recently gone into the black, and when they return to the States they'll be headliners. Take advantage of seeing this unknown group this time around.

Next time they visit, you might not get a ticket.

DANNY HOLLOWAY

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 24, 1973

WHEN the film industry was at its peak and the Hollywood Hills beamed down on the Babylon city in its celluloid wrapper, someone decided that the value of houses would rise if there were tangible proof that the building was, actually, situated in Hollywood.

So they built a sign, a huge white eye-catcher up in the hills, that simply said "Hollywood" – in capital letters, of course.

To reach the sign, the visitor must drive up snake-like roads, past a riding stable, and finally complete the journey on foot. Built alongside these roads are quaint houses that Hollywood now regards as old, though by British standards they'd just be pre-war.

No two houses seem alike, and the majority are built on Spanish or Swiss lines. In one of them lives Linda Ronstadt.

This afternoon Linda is sat cross-legged on a couch sewing a tapestry and listening to the tapes of a Chris Hillman album on which she sings back-up.

She is, as the saying goes, as pretty as a picture.

She's wearing a pair of faded jeans and white tee-shirt which extols the virtues of a brand of tequila. The previous week she'd done a few nights at the Roxy Club, dressed in an Annie Oakley outfit minus six-gun.

It was a set of largely country music from a band hastily put together – an almost flawless performance in which Linda more than put over her warm, friendly personality. Many people (including myself) fell hopelessly in love with her.

So here I am, with the same young lady sat a couple of feet away on a soft couch. Euphoria. She even wants me to take her for some English fish and chips after the interview's over.

But we're digressing. Linda's musical background is heavily influenced by country and Mexican music – there's a touch of Mexico, even, in her blood.

Her grandfather was a musician and music was passed down the line; her father played guitar, he taught Linda's sister to play, Linda's sister taught Linda's brother and her brother taught Linda.

"I learned to play a few chords when I was 16 [*she's 27 now*], but I didn't play much more than that. It wasn't until I came to California that I played a lot. In fact, I've only really been concentrating on my guitar playing during the last few months. I'm really a beginner."

"We feel we have to compete": Linda Ronstadt at the Aquarius Theater in LA, October 24, 1973

ABC PHOTO ARCHIVES/DISNEY GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT/GETTY IMAGES

LINDA'S first musical venture was with her brother and sister in Tucson, Arizona, where she was brought up – singing in bars and on local TV and radio shows. It was a mixture of folk, country, bluegrass and Mexican music.

"I'm a real freak for Mexican music. I've been influenced by Mexican singers more than anything, and by Hank Williams, because that was the music I sang when I was young. I listen mostly to black music now because that's what I like, even though I don't sing like that. Really I'm a hopelessly white singer. I like Lola Beltran, who is the hottest chick singer in Mexico. She's a real folk hero to them."

TALES OF 'DESPERADO'

The song that became a hit for Linda Ronstadt...

PERHAPS The Eagles' most beautiful and emotive song, "Desperado" caught everyone off guard. Previously, Don Henley's sole writing contribution had been the words to "Witchy Woman" – "Then the next song he finished was 'Desperado'!" laughs Bernie Leadon. It wasn't just a pivotal moment in Henley's writing; in displaying an explicit awareness of the emotional pitfalls of the lifestyle they'd chosen, it became an iconic Eagles song and a natural bookend to the equally reflective "Hotel California".

According to photographer Henry Diltz, Henley had written an embryonic version of the song before the *Desperado* concept idea was fully formed. "It was started by Don as a wake-up song for a friend," says Diltz. "'For God's sake, Leo, why don't you come to your senses?'"

Never a single for the Eagles, it became a hit for Linda Ronstadt later in 1973, with JD Souther producing.

"It's a beautiful melody and a good piece of literary work; the metaphors are rich – he was showing that his English major had paid off," says Leadon, adding with a laugh, "I don't think I wanted to admit at the time how good it was!" ***GRAEME THOMSON***

The Stone Poneys in 1967: (l–r) Linda Ronstadt, Bobby Kimmel, Kenny Edwards

The Stone Poneys, managed by Frank Zappa's manager Herbie Cohen, were Linda's first serious musical venture.

It was the beginning of a series of backing bands including a variety of musicians from the somewhat incestuous country/folk/LA scene. And, like so many others, Linda's first breaks came from Doug Weston's Troubador Club.

She appeared at a Troubador Hoot night and the audition resulted in a gig as opening act for Oscar Brown Jnr.

"It was murder, because it was a black audience and there we were playing folk music. It was really pathetic, like throwing me to the lions, and the band I was with broke up after that. We were so demoralised.

"After that Herbie Cohen wanted to manage me, not the rest of the group, but I felt some loyalty towards them. All I can remember now is that everyone in that group ended up making some money – apart from me. I wanted to do country stuff but my manager didn't.

"No-one was doing country stuff then. Gram Parsons, I guess, might have been – I didn't know him then – but The Byrds hadn't even started doing it.

"After my first album came out I remember going down to some club in the Valley where the Burnito Brothers would play and I thought Sneeky Pete was such a great slide player. I knew Clarence White well, too; he used to come to Tucson when I was a kid."

Linda's albums for Capitol, she says, are best forgotten, and she's not even too pleased about her first set for Elektra. After the demise of her group, it was decided that she should become a solo artist, although she felt herself that she wasn't ready for such a step.

"My manager and the record company put a lot of pressure on me to do things, so I kept going out on the road with different bands that were really awful. I couldn't sing properly, and what I really needed was to sit at home with my guitar and learn to play and sing.

"I don't think it was until last year that I really started making some progress, and that was because I started learning guitar. I wasn't good enough to get the most out of the musicians I was with. The only way you can get good is to hang out with people who are good, but I never hung around with singers.

"The first band I can remember having a good time with was a bunch of musicians who were from the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band."

Linda made one album in Nashville where, she says, there's a totally different approach to country music than in California.

"I'm still not happy with this album, but at least it doesn't make me cringe like the others"

LINDA RONSTADT

"It was a painful experience because they didn't seem to understand what I wanted there, and I thought it was a bad record.

"And there was a hit song from that album, 'Long Long Time' which meant that a lot of people heard the album. I still didn't know how to sing properly then. I really thought I had no business making a record, and that I should have been home practising.

"I don't think I really did any singing on a record until this last one I've done for Asylum, and even that was hard to make."

Linda's introduction to Asylum, after being with Capitol for almost seven years, came about through John David Souther, with whom she was living until recently.

"I'd known David Geffen for a long time, but I got to know him better through John David and Jackson Browne, who was a close friend of his. John Boylan, my manager, just rang up David Geffen and told him I needed a new company.

"I'm still not too happy about this album but at least it doesn't make me cringe when I play it like my others did. Some of my albums make me depressed and want to stop singing altogether. I always think I could have done better.

"John David ended up producing the album, but that made me feel inhibited because I could never sing properly in front of him. I did some of his songs and he wanted a say in how I made them."

Though not a strong women's libber, Linda feels girls in the rock business should stick together instead of competing with each other.

"Somebody once said – I think it was George Bernard Shaw – that competition was for horse-racing and not for the arts, and that's so true. It's difficult to retain your femininity in the music business; there aren't many women who don't come on like a truck driver in this business.

"I know that when I come off the road after being with men for a long time, the conversation gets to a very low level. I can hardly talk to people after a tour, as I find myself talking real dirty and offending someone.

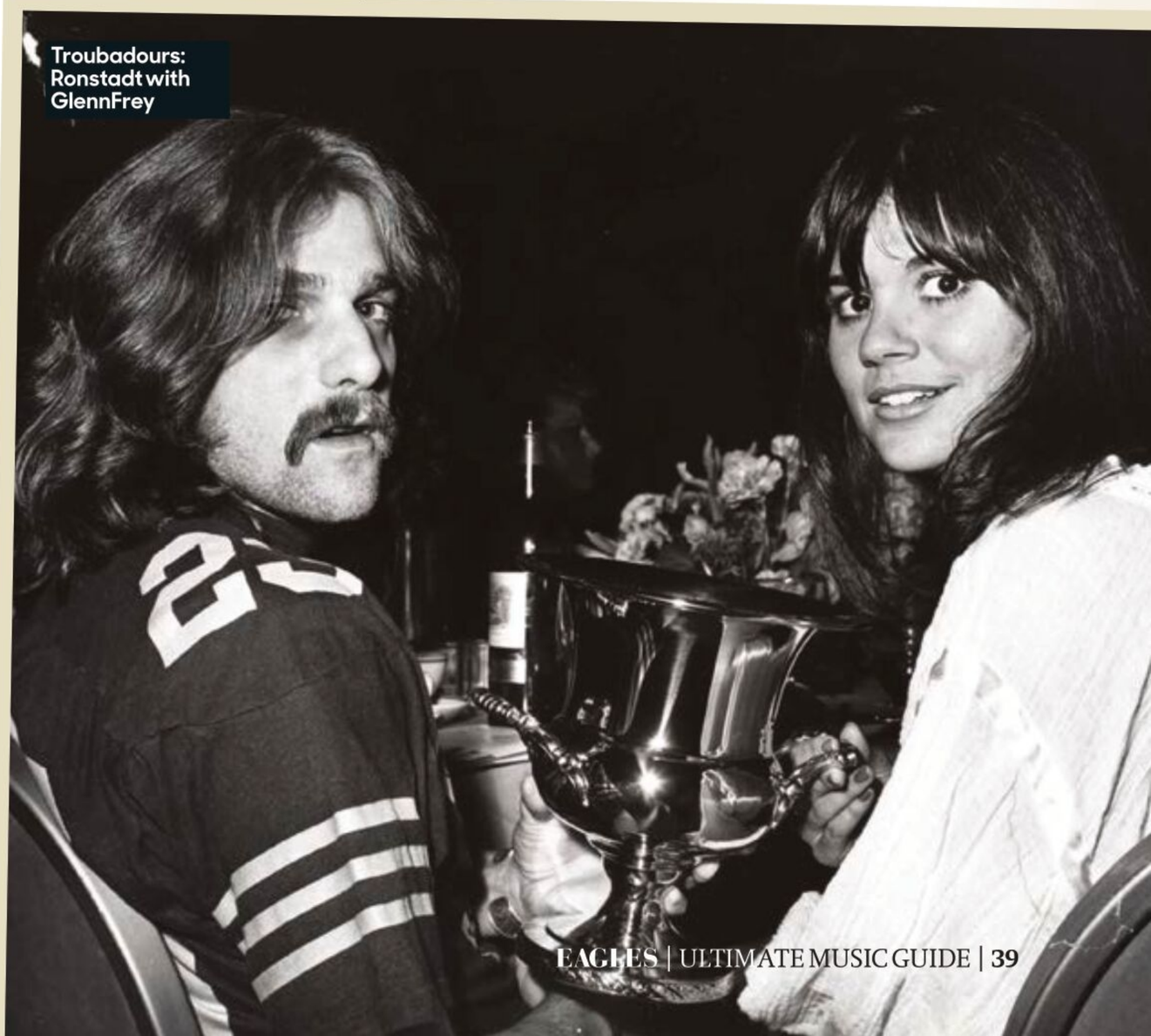
"We feel we have to compete. I'm sure the age of girl singers is about to come, though.

"There's a girl somewhere, no-one's heard her yet, but she's going to take the world by storm. The day of people saying 'well, she plays pretty good guitar for a girl' is over."

In this respect, Linda is gradually becoming able to tell musicians what to play behind her.

"I find that the better the players, the more competent and the more musical ability they have, the easier it is for me to approach them about what I want. The players that aren't so good object to having a girl tell them what to do."

CHRIS CHARLESWORTH


Troubadours: Ronstadt with Glenn Frey

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS, GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

RELEASED: MARCH 22, 1974

ON THE BORDER

But can Eagles rock? Strutting and tubthumping, Eagles come home to roost in America, and win its heart – with a ballad.

BY MARK BEAUMONT

BARNES, South London, isn't known for its dustbowl vibe. A bunch of LA country rockers like Eagles singing songs of truck stop lotharios, Hollywood rebels and the hardest of honky tonk drinkers might understandably feel that the ambience of London's autumn drizzle is less than conducive to the hazy American dreamland they were conjuring, its bustle a distraction from the wide open spaces in their heads.

"We couldn't think over there," Henley told *Crawdaddy* magazine. "We couldn't create. We were too busy trying to find a good restaurant."

Between meals, as they arrived at Olympic to start recording their follow-up to *Desperado* in September 1973, the Eagles were on a dangerous collision course with their producer Glyn Johns. Their work with the producer had so far been an mostly peacable blend of give and take: emphasising their country lushness, had paid dividends on *Eagles*, but the Wild West schtick of *Desperado* and its singles had fared less well in the charts. Fearing an inexorable slide into obscurity, the band were keen to up the momentum and indulge in the kind of lick-heavy rock that had taken The Allman Brothers to No 1 in 1973 with *Brothers And Sisters*.

Johns, however, hadn't buckled up to go off-road. "You are not a rock'n'roll band," he told them mid-session, pushing back against their desire to move away from his gentler Americana vision of the band and have a greater say over the direction of the record, "The Who is a rock'n'roll band, and you're not that."

"Glyn had a stamp he put on his records which is a deep echo that is really smooth like ice cream," Henley said. "[*He*] thought we were a nice, country-rock, semi-acoustic band, and every time we wanted to rock'n'roll, he could name a thousand British bands that could do it better."

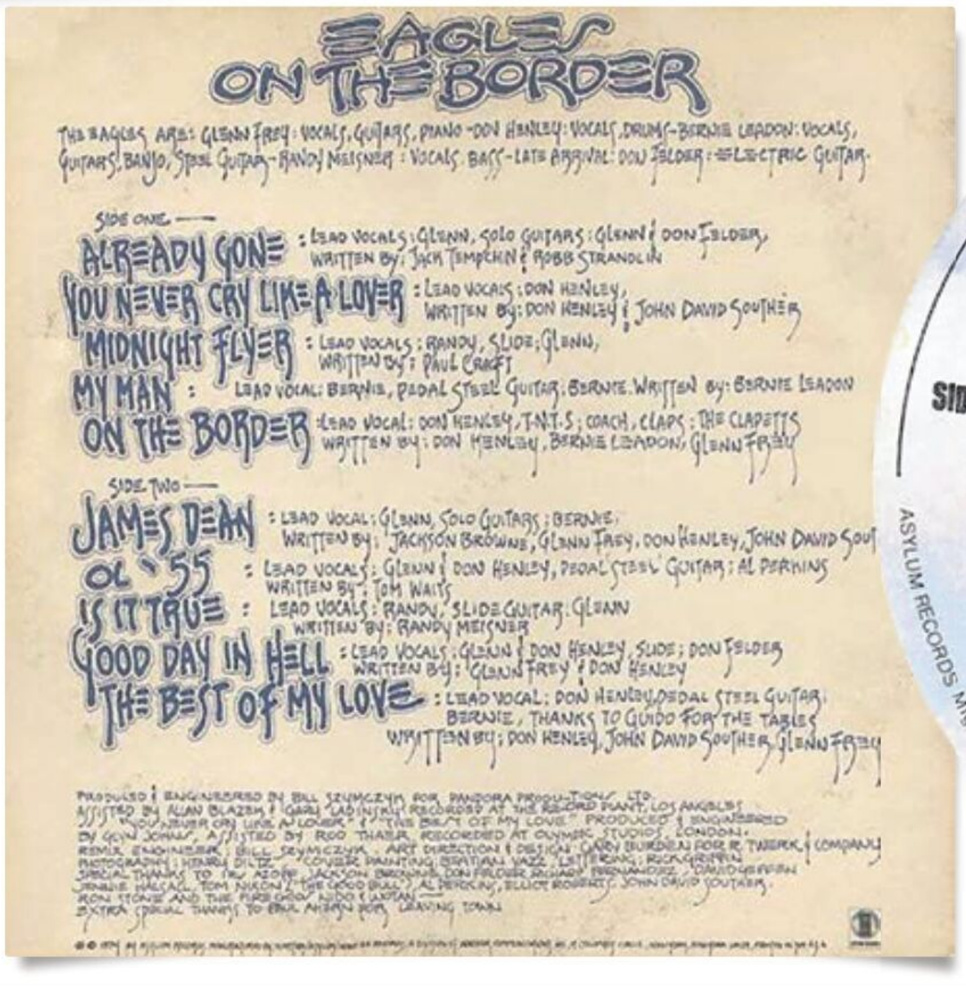
History isn't full of fairy-tale endings for producers who curtail bands' natural evolutions, nor their personal behaviours. Within six weeks, with just two of the recorded tracks deemed fit for the album ("Best Of My Love" and "You Never Cry Like A Lover", both sumptuous country ballads bearing Johns' hallmark), the sessions collapsed amid heated creative clashes between band and producer.

"The six weeks in the studio were a disaster area," Johns claimed two days after the crunch, absolving himself of blame and claiming he was open to the band's input. "I certainly got frustrated on some occasions and pissed [*off*] because they wouldn't grab the situation by the balls and get on with it. I don't believe in kid-gloving artists... There were a lot of hang-ups, individually and with each other. But what it boils down to is they weren't ready to make another record."

> **"It was time for a change... to do something more challenging"**
> **GLENN FREY**

The band, obviously, had a different perspective. "I just think it was time for a change... to do something more challenging," said Frey, while Henley cut to the chase. "We just wanted to sound American instead of English."

Back to their native habitat of LA, then, to hook up with (in Frey's words) "a premier American rock'n'roll producer" Bill Szymczyk at Record Plant Studios. Suggested by Azoff, who had hired him to produce the second album by another of his charges – Joe Walsh – in 1973, Szymczyk would give the band far more freedom in the studio, allowing them to cut down on the tape echo and chase a thinner, more live rock sound. They'd place this ▶


EAGLES
ON THE BORDER

THE EAGLES ARE: GLENN FREY: VOCALS, GUITARS, PIANO - DON HENLEY: VOCALS, DRUMS - BERNIE LEADON: VOCALS, GUITARS, BANJO, STEEL GUITAR - RANDY MEISNER: VOCALS, BASS - LATE ARRIVAL: DON FELDER: ELECTRIC GUITAR.

SIDE ONE —

ALREADY GONE : LEAD VOCALS: GLENN, SOLO GUITARS: GLENN & DON FELDER, WRITTEN BY: JACK TEMPCHIN & ROBB STRANDLIN

YOU NEVER CRY LIKE A LOVER : LEAD VOCALS: DON HENLEY, WRITTEN BY: DON HENLEY & JOHN DAVID SOUTHER

MIDNIGHT FLYER : LEAD VOCALS: RANDY, SLIDE: GLENN, WRITTEN BY: PAUL CRAFT

MY MAN : LEAD VOCAL: BERNIE, PEDAL STEEL GUITAR: BERNIE. WRITTEN BY: BERNIE LEADON

ON THE BORDER LEAD VOCAL: DON HENLEY, T-N-T-S; COACH, CLAPS: THE CLAPETTS WRITTEN BY: DON HENLEY, BERNIE LEADON, GLENN FREY

SIDE TWO —

JAMES DEAN : LEAD VOCAL: GLENN, SOLO GUITARS: BERNIE. WRITTEN BY: JACKSON BROWNE, GLENN FREY, DON HENLEY, JOHN DAVID SOUTHER

OL' 55 : LEAD VOCALS: GLENN & DON HENLEY, PEDAL STEEL GUITAR: AL PERKINS WRITTEN BY: TOM WAITS

IS IT TRUE : LEAD VOCALS: RANDY, SLIDE GUITAR: GLENN WRITTEN BY: RANDY MEISNER

GOOD DAY IN HELL : LEAD VOCALS: GLENN & DON HENLEY, SLIDE: DON FELDER WRITTEN BY: GLENN FREY & DON HENLEY

THE BEST OF MY LOVE : LEAD VOCAL: DON HENLEY, PEDAL STEEL GUITAR: BERNIE. THANKS TO GUIDO FOR THE TABLES WRITTEN BY: DON HENLEY, JOHN DAVID SOUTHER, GLENN FREY

PRODUCED & ENGINEERED BY BILL SZYMCZYK FOR PANDORA PRODUCTIONS LTD.
ASSISTED BY ALAN BLAZEN & GARY LADINSKY. RECORDED AT THE RECORD PLANT, LOS ANGELES.
"YOU NEVER CRY LIKE A LOVER" & "THE BEST OF MY LOVE" PRODUCED & ENGINEERED BY GLYN JOHNS, ASSISTED BY ROD THAIER. RECORDED AT OLYMPIC STUDIOS, LONDON.
REMIX ENGINEER: BILL SZYMCZYK. ART DIRECTION & DESIGN: GARY BURDEN & JOE W. TWERK & COMPANY
PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRY DILTZ. COVER PAINTING: BENTAVIA VAZZ. LETTERING: RICK GRIFFIN
SPECIAL THANKS TO: THE ABOVE, JACKSON BROWNE, DON FELDER, RICHARD FERNANDEZ, DAVID GEFFEN
URBAN HALL, TOM NIXON, THE GOOD BALL, AL PERKINS, ELLIOT ROBERTS, JOHN DAVID SOUTHER,
IRON STONE AND THE PURE GOOD GUIDO & LAXTAN —
EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS TO ERIC ANDERSEN FOR LEAVING TOWN.

brazen new attitude front and centre on the finished album, titled *On The Border* but far removed from *Desperado*'s evocations of frontier America. "Already Gone", one of the first tracks recorded during the LA sessions, kicked the record off with a cocky rock strut and kiss-off bravado. A track mailed to Frey by Jack Tempchin in the wake of Eagles recording his "Peaceful Easy Feeling", it told of a man cheerfully clocking out of a relationship before his disinterested partner can call time, and could easily have appealed to the band as a concealed flip of the bird at Johns - "*you can see the stars and still not see the light,*" Frey sings, and later "*often times it happens that we live our lives in chains, and we never even know we have the key...'Cause I'm already gone, and I'm feelin' strong*".

Crucially, "Already Gone" powered in on the back of grimy, overlapping roadster riffs clashing wheels with Thin Lizzy and the Allmans. They made the track the blueprint for *Rumours*-era Fleetwood Mac, and were similarly the result of a pivotal new arrival. Looking to add crunch to the album's harder rock tracks, Szymczyk suggested they seek out a slide guitar player; Leadon put forward his old friend Don Felder, who'd occasionally jam with Eagles in their LA rehearsal space. Self-taught on a guitar he'd swapped with a friend for a handful of cherry bombs, Felder had learned slide guitar from Duane Allman himself (and claimed, in turn, to have taught Tom Petty), and started his first band, The Continentals, aged just 13 (noted alumni: Stephen Stills, Bernie Leadon). In January 1974 Felder was backing David Blue and playing in the Crosby/Nash band, but his last-minute work on "Already Gone" and "Good Day In Hell" convinced Eagles to poach him permanently. "With every take he just blew us all away," Frey said. "If he isn't Duane Allman reincarnate, I don't know who the fuck is."

On stage, the "fuller" five-piece Eagles would be afforded greater space, Felder taking on mandolin and rhythm parts that allowed Frey to take to the keyboard and Leadon to play details that might otherwise have been left back in the studio. Before his arrival, though – even in Szymczyk's more encouraging hands and tackling modern politics and recent personal loss rather than classical American themes – they didn't drag *On The Border* quite as far out of their safety zone as they might have intended.

"YOU Never Cry Like A Lover", a Henley/Souther co-write originating from the Johns sessions, is characteristically plush and harmony-slick, Henley by turns forlorn and anguished about his dispassionate partner over a downbeat country backing led by Frey's sensitive piano performance; "*I can't live with you baby, can't live without it*", he sighs. But Szymczyk doesn't add any more heft to further ballads like "My Man", Leadon's honeyed tribute to his one-time Flying Burrito Brothers bandmate Gram Parsons, victim of a drug overdose in September 1973, aged 26. "*He travelled along, touch your heart, then be gone*", Leadon sang on the archetypal Americana ballad, "*like a flower he bloomed till that old hickory wind called him home*". Befitting its subject, a heartbreaker.

A rich country cover of Tom Waits' "Ol' '55", dismissed as "antiseptic" by Waits but heavy on heart-tugging harmonies and certainly in keeping with its tale of a euphoric dawn drive across LA fresh from the arms of a new lover, occupies similar lustrous territory. And much of "Midnight Flyer", meanwhile, could have fallen straight out of the saddle bag of *Desperado*. All freight-hopping banjo, locomotive rhythms and harmonies like a train whistle, for its first three minutes it's a hoedown escape anthem – Meisner, fleeing a hog-tie of a relationship – that sounds caught in the act of jumping the first train out of Dodge, destination: anywhere she's not. It's only in the final minutes that a phasing psychedelic guitar solo leads the song elsewhere, to a universe in which Pink Floyd hailed from Nashville and never made it out of the honky-tonks.

"James Dean", of course, actually had fallen off *Desperado*. Originally written for Frey's proposed anti-hero concept album, then deemed a bad fit when that album became *Desperado* instead, this unalloyed slice of silver screen idolatry (primarily a Browne composition) found a more fitting home here, where its 12-bar roadhouse charge helped bolster Eagles' rock'n'roll ambitions. Likewise the seamy groove of the title track, an example of what Henley described as Szymczyk's "raw and funky presence" and the most pointed example on *On The Border* of Eagles moving their finger off the pages of history and on to the pulse.

The border in question isn't any shifting state line, but a political boundary

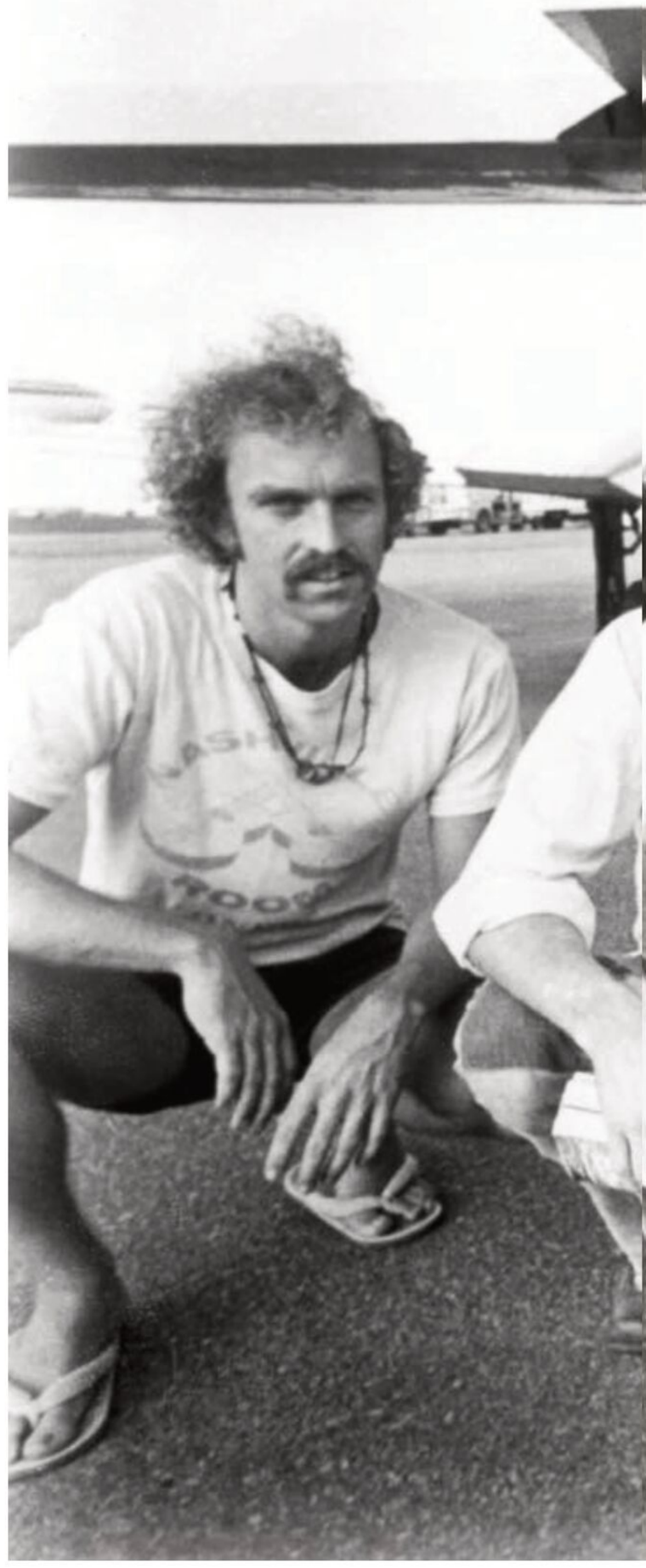
The border in question isn't any shifting state line of the Old West, but a political boundary. In the wake of the 1972 Watergate scandal, in which Richard Nixon's administration conspired to steal documents and bug phones in a break-in of the Democratic National Committee HQ, Henley, Frey and Leadon were driven to a rare (at that juncture) burst of protest song. "*Don't you tell me 'bout your law and order*", Henley sings, referencing Big Brother and phone tapping as he takes a bold stand against surveillance culture and Nixon's leap across the line into authoritarianism: "*you better step to the right or we can make it hard*".

Lyrically, this was Eagles at their most piercing and prescient: Frey even mutters the *Rowan & Martin's Laugh* In sign off "*say goodnight, Dick*" during

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"Compared with the previous two Eagles records this is a lot more concise, a lot more clean-cut and everybody seems to be going in the same direction. And the sound is just right, great production, great record. Go out and buy this just as soon as it's released in a fortnight's time and you'll have all the good parts, the sins and girls, of California in your front room too."
STEVE CLARK, NME, MARCH 30, 1974

"Their third album, recorded partly in London but mainly on home ground in LA, is a little gem. Exactingly balanced between rock and ballad (there are five tracks in each style), it shows a steadily maturing band playing some unusually evocative, finely honed music that quite simply is a joy to hear."
JW, MELODY MAKER, APRIL 20, 1974



GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

Expanded edition: the Eagles prepare for take-off circa 1974, with new boy Don Felder second right

the closing funk-out, five months before Tricky Dicky did indeed resign. But musically they'd come to consider its marriage of funk, country and Motown soul a confused, and somewhat boozy, clash. To get in the zone to emulate rather than imitate The Temptations for the break of the song, Frey admitted that they got "completely liberated on gin and tonics" to sound like "white, stoned punks, drunk out of our minds". Tanqueray and tonic, under the pseudonym T.N.T.S., even got a credit for vocals on the track.

If Meisner's "Is It True?" was the album's only forgettable cut, a regretful, mid-paced break-up ballad only notable for setting the harmonic tone for ELO's prime era, "Good Day In Hell" gives *On The Border* a sting in the tail. Dominated by the feral slide guitar of Felder's first recording with Eagles, sleaze dripping from every string, it acted as both a tribute to lost hellraisers Parsons and Danny Whitten (the guitarist who overdosed in 1972 within hours of being fired from Crazy Horse) and a portrait of the perils of the music industry and its associated lifestyle, where there's always someone "*feeding you whiskey and wine*", "*every girl's a fork in the road*" and you've a hotline to the boardroom devil, encouraging you to go down in flames. "*All this gratification and sick conversation, someone get me out of town*", Henley and Frey harmonised, an early sign of issues to come, but they'd have plenty more conference calls with Belzebub before the road ran out.

On The Border stands as a subtly successful example of the transition album; a firm but not too heavy step in the right direction, which instigated relationships with Azoff, Felder and Szymczyk that would see them through one of the most successful imperial periods in rock'n'roll history. Ultimately, though, Johns got the last laugh. The second track kept over from his sessions, "Best Of My Love", was tucked away at the end of the album, overlooked and unappreciated. A laidback bayou country love song to Henley's then girlfriend Suzannah Martin, written mid-split, it had a tune (Souther believed) pilfered by Frey from a Fred Neil record, transposed to a mis-remembered Joni Mitchell tuning and rushed to completion in London.

Frey pushed back against suggestions that it might make a good single for some time, but events conspired to overrule him. A DJ at WKMI-AM in Kalamazoo, Missouri, took it upon himself to champion "Best Of My Love" on-air over the album's official singles, and notified Asylum Records that the boards lit up. A limited 1,000 copy run of the single in the Kalamazoo area proved popular so – with "Already Gone" a minor hit at No 32, "James Dean" stalling at No 77 and *On The Border* looking to go the way of *Desperado* – the song received a belated release as the LP's third single, truncated for radio by the label without the band's permission.

It was everything Eagles didn't want to define *On The Border*: an acoustic country song in their traditional style, with no say from the band on the finished product. On hearing about the edit, Henley demanded the single be pulled from stores, and Azoff would later send the label a gold disc with a chunk cut out, on a plaque engraved "The Golden Hacksaw Award". Yet it was a smash. In March 1975 it became their first *Billboard* No 1, launching an era of chart and sales success few would ever match and becoming a cornerstone of the best-selling Greatest Hits collection of the 20th Century. Eagles had taken wing, bound for unprecedented heights.

SLEEVE NOTES ON THE BORDER

1 Already Gone ★★★★★
2 You Never Cry Like A Lover ★★★
3 Midnight Flyer ★★★★
4 My Man ★★★★
5 On The Border ★★★
6 James Dean ★★★★
7 Ol' '55 ★★★
8 Is It True? ★★
9 Good Day In Hell ★★★★
10 Best Of My Love ★★★★★

LABEL: Asylum Records
PRODUCED BY: Glyn Johns, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Olympic Studios, London; Record Plant Studios, LA
PERSONNEL: Glenn Frey (vocals, guitar, piano), Don Henley (vocals, drums), Bernie Leadon (vocals, guitar, banjo, pedal steel), Randy Meisner (vocals, bass), Don Felder (guitar), Al Perkins (pedal steel guitar)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 28; US 17

"CALIFORNIA LIKE AN ANGRY

Something mellow and poignant is stirring in the western USA. *NME*'s man in buckskin, STEVE CLARKE, takes a look around the Californian rock scene – touching on LINDA RONSTADT, JACKSON BROWNE, SOUTHER-HILLMAN-FURAY and the EAGLES – and ponders how the country rock scene has streamlined and perfected itself, to provide the gleaming sound of 1975.

NME APRIL 5, 1975

CALIFORNIA has always been the place for rock dreams. The Promised Land – "The teen heaven, where the sun was always shining, where the cosmic surfer's wave unfurled towards infinity, where everyone was golden, young and beautiful forever," as Nick Cohn elegised in *Rock Dreams*.

As a result, California has produced some of the very best rock'n'roll. Both Los Angeles and San Francisco have served as foci, although apart from a brief period in 1967 when the latter city showed the initiative by spawning what were at the time referred to as the acid-rock bands Los Angeles has always been California's premier scene for rock'n'roll activity.

It spawned that great American triumvirate of '60s bands, The Beach Boys, The Byrds and the Buffalo Springfield, each in its own way distinguishing itself with its own particular songwriting capabilities, flair for melody and vocal harmonies – whether it was The Beach Boys singing about the idealised California of "California Girls" or "All Summer Long" or the Springfield's more realistic vision of "For What It's Worth", inspired by rioting between cops and students on Sunset Strip.

And while The Byrds never actually got to praise or otherwise the virtues of one particular facet of California, a good deal of their music had a sense of open spaces and a freshness that was best thought of as coming from California and nowhere else.

Both the Springfield, and particularly The Byrds, had in their ranks (in The Byrds' case, their lineups displayed an inconsistency equalled only by the numerous John Mayall lineups, but he's another story...) musicians who had some, if not all, of their roots in country music.

In Springfield the two heavier talents of Neil Young and Stephen Stills left it until later in their careers before exploring these roots to any extent.

For Stills, it wasn't until he formed Manassas that the country side of his musical make-up came to the fore, whereas Young's leanings that way are hinted at throughout his work, be it as soloist or member of CSN&Y. On the Springfield's debut album (*Buffalo Springfield*, issued in 1967) Stills' "Go And Say Goodbye" hinted at this part of his musical character. Likewise for Neil Young with "I Am A Child", one of the few totally convincing cuts on the band's third and final album *Last Time Around*. Richie Furay, the group's plaintive-voiced vocalist whose not inconsiderable song writing talents were overshadowed by those of Young and Stills, also had a finger in the country pie as his "A Child's Claim To Fame" (from the Springfield's most accomplished album, *Buffalo Springfield Again*) showed.

The Byrds, however, under the influence of the late Gram Parsons – a musician totally immersed in country music – allowed country ➤

New kid in town: the Eagles in 1976, with Joe Walsh (second left) drafted in to replace Bernie Leadon

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

IS SHAKING CHILD..."

When you have Linda Ronstadt topping the bill over Roger McGuinn and The Byrds, it's fair to say the times have indeed changed

more or less to dominate the group from the time Parsons joined in 1968 (to record *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo*) until their demise, long after Parsons' departure in 1972 – so it's possible to say that The Byrds invented Los Angeles country rock, although when in 1973 the original band reformed for a one-off tour and album you'd hardly have thought it. And bands like the Eagles and Stills' Manassas sounded much more comfortable playing the music, albeit with their own distinctive stamps, that The Byrds had invented some five years earlier.

And when you have Linda Ronstadt topping the bill over Roger McGuinn and band, you do realise that the times have indeed changed and a whole new generation of LA countrified rockers have emerged, experiencing commercial success on a scale whereby those who supposedly know about these things are tipping the Eagles to become America's hottest band by the end of the year in much the same way the Allmans ruled the roost a year or so back.

THOSE of you who glance at the American charts will have realised that Ms Ronstadt, a ripe, cherubic-looking filly whose sensuality must be an important factor in her current US popularity, has recently topped both album and singles charts in America. Also up at the forefront of what can loosely be called LA country-rock is one Jackson Browne, and it is on these artists that this writer wishes to concentrate, since neither of them has come anywhere near to achieving the acceptance in this country their talent demands. Although in Linda Ronstadt's case it's only with her fifth (and most recent album) *Heart Like A Wheel* that she has made music worthy of large-scale attention.

Besides, all three have links that stretch beyond their common record label, David Geffen's Asylum Records, a label that is as immediately associated with LA country-rock as Atlantic Records is with soul music.

Geffen also managed the Eagles and Browne, while one frail-looking Englishman called Peter Asher, formerly of this country's pop duo Peter and Gordon, looks after Ms Ronstadt and actually produced *Heart Like A Wheel*.

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

Fellow travellers: The Souther-Hillman-Furay Band in 1976 - (l-r) Chris Hillman, JD Souther and Richie Furay

Immediately before grouping as Eagles, three of the band, Glenn Frey (guitar and vocals), Don Henley (drums and vocals), and Randy Meisner (bass and vocals and an original member of Poco, one of the country-rock bands who for a time looked like succeeding but left it to the Eagles instead) were in Ronstadt's back-up band. Browne also has a close relationship with Eagles, contributing material to the band and using members of the Eagles on his own albums.

When the Eagles formed in August 1971, all four musicians, (the lineup is completed by Bernie Leadon, vocals and guitar) were veterans of the country-rock school. Frey had played with John David Souther (an Asylum solo artist in his own right, ex-boyfriend of Linda Ronstadt and Joni Mitchell, joint composer of several of Eagles' songs and the Souther of LA country-rock's biggest disappointment, The Souther-Hillman-Furay Band – yes, the same Furay that was mentioned earlier in connection with Buffalo Springfield; and while we're playing these incest games, it might as well be mentioned that Hillman is the original Byrds bassist and Stephen Stills' batman in Manassas) in an acoustic duo calling themselves Longbranch Pennywhistle, from 1968 to '71. Leadon was for a time a Flying Burrito Brother, and if I look hard enough at Pete Frame's vastly complicated and highly proficient *Zigzag* family tree, "The Evolution Of The Eagles", I'll probably find out that Frey was a member of The Santa Fe Silver Spoon Boot Boys way back when...

IN other words, the Eagles were now callow youths and had all paid their dues when, at the suggestion of John Boylan (Boylan is another of Ronstadt's old flames and has produced her records), they formed a band. After spending a period of intensive rehearsing at a club in Aspen, Colorado, playing four sets a night, six nights a week, they flew over to London to record *Eagles*, some 4,000 miles from Sunset Boulevard, with Glyn Johns as producer/engineer.

The recording took place in the depths of an English winter, but the sounds that subsequently came from the album and its single, "Take It Easy", had as much to do with the Califomian outdoors in their own way as anything The Beach Boys had ever produced, although there was a dark side to their work which never existed in early Beach Boys recordings.

All four of the band sang and wrote well and sometimes excellently, and on *Eagles* demonstrated that they were very capable musicians, even if Henley's drumming was sometimes lacking just the slightest in sensitivity.

Their four-part harmonies were as distinctive as those of The Beach Boys, Springfield and Byrds and throughout their music had a wide-open youthful ambience not easy to come by in the cynical '70s.

Nowhere was all this more apparent than on "Take It Easy", the album's opener and smash hit single; in fact "Take It Easy", an irresistible flowing piece of rock'n'roll, as relevant to the genre as the best of Chuck Berry, conjuring up images of cruisin' along in an open-topped Ford Thunderbird, a girl for every finger, was the US summer hit of 1972, and even received heavy air-play over here – although the British public preferred to spend their pennies elsewhere. Jackson Browne co-wrote the song with Frey, who sings it in his perfect American rock'n'roll voice, a voice that isn't far removed from Browne's singing itself, possessing, though, a little more zip.

Browne's lyrics themselves have about as much rock'n'roll incisiveness as "The Promised Land" and, like several of his other songs, prove that he understands the essence of rock'n'roll so well. As the song's second verse makes clear:

"*Standin' on a corner in Winslow, Arizona/Such a fine sight to see/It's a girl, my lord, in a flatbed Ford/Slowin' down to take a look at me*".

Another of Browne's songs, "Nightingale" closed the side. A mid-tempo rocker, it came on too much like a hybrid of "Take It Easy" and Frey's dynamic arrogant rocker "Chug All Night", and was one of the album's weakest cuts.

Asylum released at least three singles from *Eagles*: "Take It Easy" (which incidentally featured a B-side, Frey's "Get You In The Mood", not included elsewhere), the slightly awesome "Witchy Woman" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling" where Frey contently sings about desert romance behind a lovely shifting chord pattern.

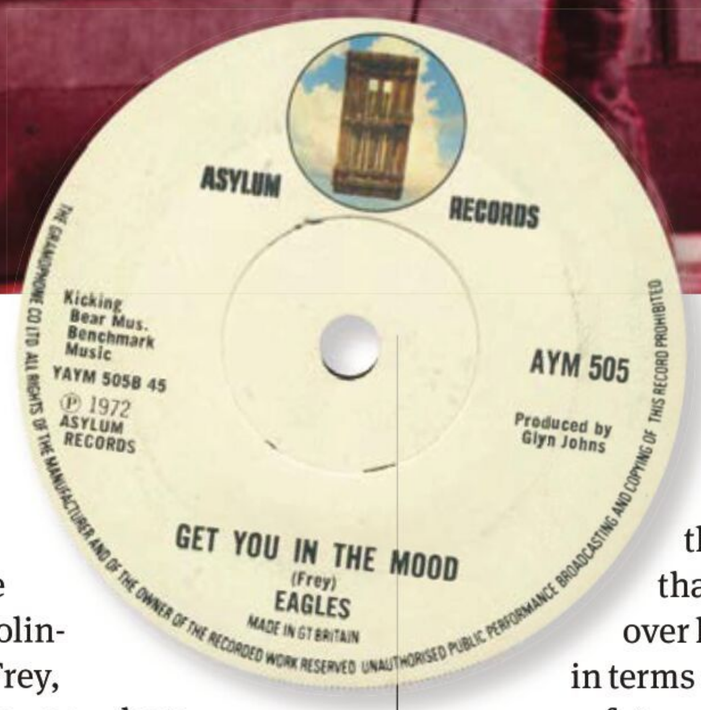
All three were hits in America, but not one made the British charts, even though the group did visit England for a brief university tour around this time.

The Eagles' music was blatantly commercial, but they didn't sacrifice music for the sake of a chart rating, and their uncomplicated, straight-ahead approach has led to undeserved criticism. Although theirs might not be as mentally stimulating as some of the music Young and Stills produced with the Springfield or as soloists, and although they didn't possess any musicians anywhere near the virtuoso class (as Manassas did), their consistency was evident from the word go: and it was further underlined with their second album, *Desperado*, considered by many as the finest of the three Eagles albums.

Again recorded in London with Glyn Johns, it was a concept album in as much as the material concentrated on the plight of the two famous outlaws, the Dalton Brothers.

Desperado was everything a second album should be, even though there wasn't a cut to top "Take It Easy" ... but that's like asking the Stones to come up with another "Brown Sugar". If every song didn't quite stand up as an entity on *Eagles*, the songs on *Desperado* did. Again an

Outlaw country rock: the Eagles perform on stage before a faux Old West backdrop in 1974



Eagles album was ripe with hit singles for the picking and the music always complemented the lyric, whether it was the bittersweet lament "Doolin-Dalton", co-written by Frey, Souther, Henley and Browne, where the mouth-harp fits the song's reflective poignancy perfectly, or the full-throttle rocker "Out Of Control", complete with sludge chords tailor-made for the 'boys out on the town and ready for a fight' feel of the song. In contrast, the following "Tequila Sunrise" was as soft and warm as a lover's touch, with Frey's vocal purity resonating clearly and relaxing over the easy-going rhythm.

The joint Henley/Frey composition "Desperado" was the Eagles as balladeers, urging the Daltons to give up their bad life. Strings and all, it's a beautiful song with a fine sense of melody. Ms Ronstadt covered it on her *Don't Cry Now* album, but her version lacked the potency of the original.

Desperado consolidated the Eagles' position as the best and most commercial band to come out of LA for a long time.

Their third and most recent album, *On The Border*, came out within months of *Desperado* and with the exception of two cuts produced in England by Johns, was recorded in LA with Bill Szymczyk producing. Szymczyk's immaculately polished hard-as-diamond sound made the Eagles even more commercial, so that *On The Border*, while not representing any measurable improvement in the group, was instantly likeable with the hint that the Eagles were interested in large-scale commercial success – which is what they currently seem to be achieving considering the re-emergence of *On The Border* in the American charts and the high sales of "The Best Of My Love", the Henley-Souther-Frey ballad.

Apparently the group themselves are disappointed that the single didn't take off over here, and are even thinking in terms of making a British visit to ensure future British chart success. Their last visit to these shores was as support act on Neil Young's late-1973 tour, where their performance, although immaculately polished and enjoyable as far as it went, smacked too much of their going through the motions of playing their best-known songs yet again.

On The Border lacks the wide-open and often acoustic arrangements of the earlier two albums, highlighting the band's excellent guitar-playing ability. In fact there's barely a track where their guitar work fails to impress.

Two numbers are particularly interesting: Leadon's tribute to the late Gram Parsons, "My Man" (Leadon and Parsons played together in the Burritos) is exceptional for Leadon's shimmering pedal steel playing and a suitably sensitive lyric which refers to the singer as "*a very talented guy who'd sing for the people and the people would cry*".

Also exceptional is the Browne-Souther-Frey-Felder (Don Felder, guitarist, vocalist and composer, joined the band for the album and the group are now a five-piece including Felder) song "James Dean".

The group are disappointed that the single didn't take off over here, and are even thinking of making a British visit

As with "Take It Easy", I expect the lyrics are Browne's and again prove his love for rock'n'roll. In contrast to "My Man", the song is a boisterous rock workout with an admirable arrangement, particularly the coda, and a lyric that is anything but necrophiliac. "Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die", the band chant against the sounds of a motorbike roaring off into the distance. Like the Eagles themselves, this song captures the spirit of rock'n'roll.

Apparently a fourth album has just been completed in LA, again with Szymczyk producing and the latter fact must be quite a record for an LA band of the Eagles' nature. They've actually stuck together some four years with only one lineup change – and that was an addition.

Most other LA bands of the same genre have changed lineups or split completely by the time they've made an album or two, the reason usually being their failure to compromise over ego-clashes (eg, Springfield, CSN&Y, The Byrds, Poco, Manassas).

The Eagles do seem to be very much a band sharing their individual talents fairly equally.

Rumour has it that The Souther-Hillman-Furay Band have packed it in while trying to record their second album. Apparently their recent US tour was disastrous, and their album certainly didn't live up to anything that the individual members had achieved in previous bands. They came on like ertstaz Eagles... which brings us to the other major talent performing in the LA country-rock genre right ➤

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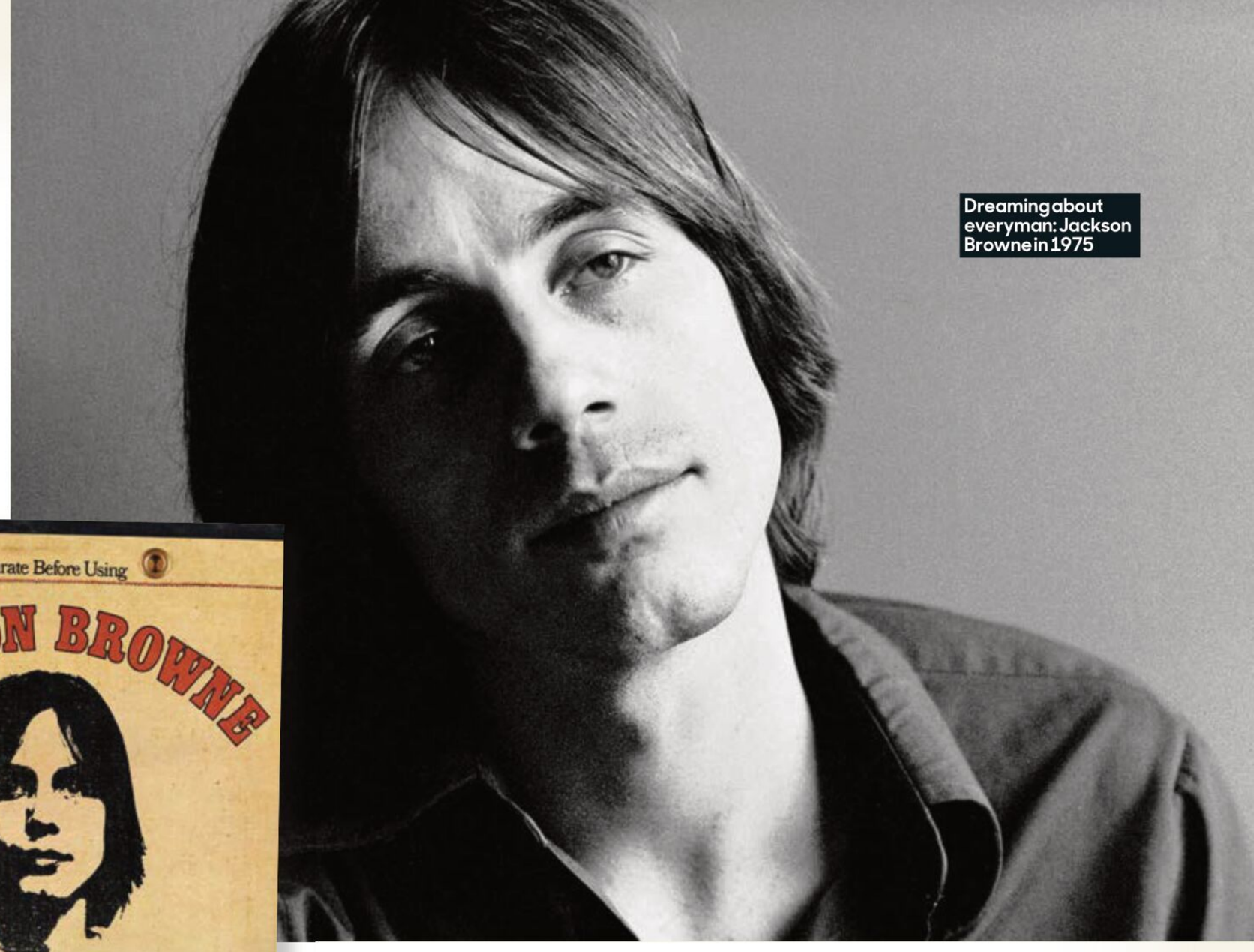
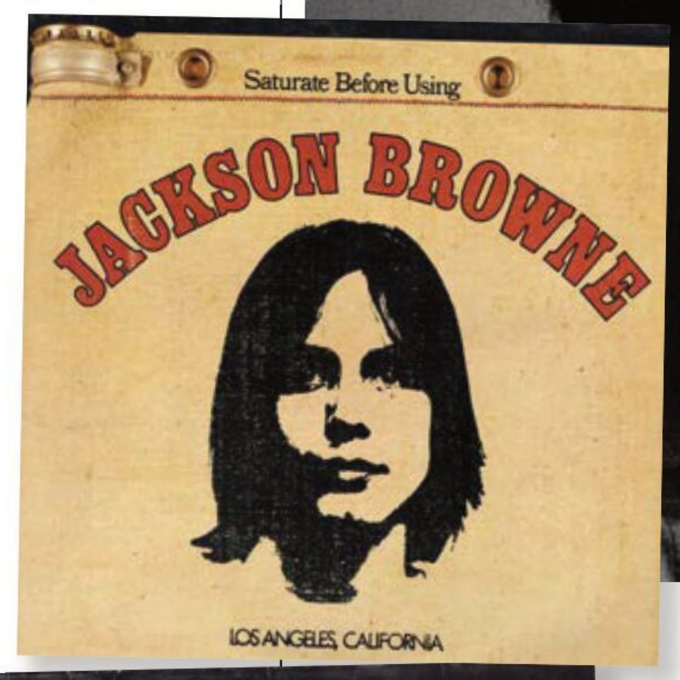


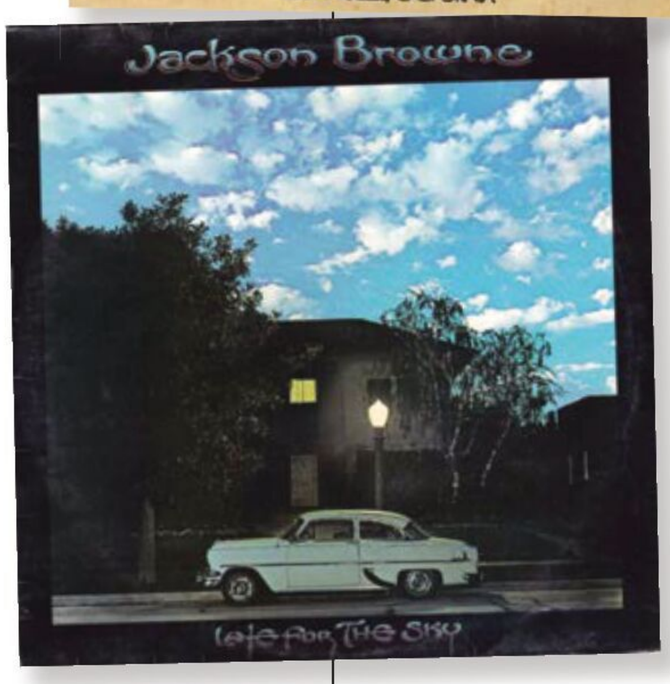
Dreaming about everyman: Jackson Browne in 1975

now, and that's Jackson Browne. Like the Eagles, Browne has a cult following over here but merits more attention. Although German by birth, he was brought up in Los Angeles from the age of three before leaving the city to spend a year or so in New York playing guitar in Nico's back-up band.

Returning to LA, he worked with The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band for six months, then decided to concentrate on a solo career.

For a long time Browne was essentially a non-performing songwriter and his songs appeared on albums by several artists before he himself brought out an album in 1972. He did, however, record an earlier album for Elektra, but it was scotched because it wasn't good enough.





As it turned out, his debut album, *Jackson Browne* (the album isn't called "Saturate Before Using"; these words refer to the water bag depicted on the cover) revealed that the fragile, boyish-looking Browne was not only good enough but also one of the most gifted singer-songwriters to make music out of Los Angeles since Neil Young or Joni Mitchell first appeared.

On *Jackson Browne*, he's backed by such seasoned LA sessioners as drummer Rus Kunkel, Jim Gordon (who, surprisingly, plays keyboards and is/was The Souther-Hillman-Furay Band's drummer), and pedal steel player Sneaky Pete. Vocal backing is by none other than David Crosby, who sings a treat.

The set showed Browne to be an unashamed romantic, fond of metaphors to do with the sea and obscure imagery referring to the sky – traits Browne's writing continued to display right through to his third album, *Late For The Sky*.

His songs weren't always easily explained and his lyricism lacked the cut-glass accuracy of Ms Mitchell or Young. Still, this lyrical mystery was enchanting and his songs were always bereft of clichés.

Sometimes he broke away from his romantic love theme ("Jamaica Say You Will"), away from telling stories ("Song For Adam'') and turn to more universal matters as on "Rock Me On The Water".

Always his melodies (sometimes attractively slight) forced the listener to try to unfurl just what it was he was singing about, and his non-powerful voice had a calming positivism that was often riveting.

THERE was also, of course, Browne the rock'n'roller, evident from his work with the Eagles and apparent on this first album in the shape of "Doctor My Eyes", the album's hit single.

Throughout the album, the arrangements were adventurous.

Browne was established in the vanguard of California's singer-songwriters even if his vision of the place was a long way away from the sun, sea, cars and girls that The Beach Boys had portrayed half a decade or so earlier. "*California is shaking like an angry child who has asked for love and is unanswered still*", sang Browne in "Something Fine".

His second album, *For Everyman*, was a collection of old and new Browne songs from a seemingly vast catalogue. It included his version of "Take It Easy", which veered more towards country than the Eagles' and lacked their drive.

Also there was "These Days", a song he'd written seven years earlier, in 1966, first covered by Tom Rush with subsequent versions appearing by Ian Matthews and Gregg Allman – whose arrangement Browne credited for inspiring his own recorded version.

For Everyman is Browne at his most accessible to date, and one of the finest records to emerge in the last five years.

Like the album before it, *For Everyman* had its hit single too, an uncompromising piece of rock'n'roll called "Red Neck Friend", featuring one Elton John on piano (Elt's referred to as Rockaday Johnnie on the album's credits) in which Browne wants to introduce some honey to his *"redneck friend"*.

It's followed on the album by a finely wrought song with more erotic overtones, "The Times You've Come", which is awesome in its beauty as Browne reflects on a terminal affair.

"Our Lady Of The Well" sees Browne realising that he can't go back to the land and bringing home the hollowness of the old hippy philosophy, once an important part of West Coast rock music. In the same song Browne sings of "*The shadow of a cruel and senseless hand*" that has crossed the land, although he is not without hope as he sings "*in some strong hearts the love and truth remain*".

The closing of *For Everyman* itself shows Browne as the post-Woodstock poet. Not for him the political sloganeering of Stills, Crosby or Nash or the latter two's naivete... Instead he offers no solutions, only describing what he sees: "*I'm not trying to tell you that I've seen the plan/Turn and run away if you think I am*". He has the honesty and intelligence to realise that he's "*just another dreamer dreaming about everyman*".

Not for Browne the political sloganeering of Stills, Crosby or Nash... He offers no solutions

Browne continues his theme of the apocalypse on his third and most recent album, *Late For The Sky*. This one often sees him confused and introspective, although one song, "Fountain Of Sorrow", is as positive and as finely constructed as anything he's ever done.

Again it's on the closing cut that Browne rejects idealism and charts the progress of others doing just that in some of his most poetic language ever.

In "Before The Deluge" he sings, "*And in the end they traded their tired wings for the resignation that living brings/And exchanged love's bright and fragile glow for the glitter and the rouge/And in a minute they were swept before the deluge*".

That's a mature statement and about as far as you can get from Brian Wilson's Californian rock dreams. The environment has changed and the music with it.

RICHARD MCCAFFREY/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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RELEASED: JUNE 20, 1975

ONE OF THESE NIGHTS

The Eagles switch musical lanes and find their sweet spot. The result? An explicit internal power shift, sci-fi country and a global breakthrough. BY PAUL MOODY

BY March 1975, the Eagles had the world at their talons. The chart-topping success of "Best Of My Love" – their first US No 1 – had established the group as Californian rock royalty, their elevated position reflected in Glenn Frey and Don Henley's new hilltop house in Los Angeles, built by Hollywood actress Dorothy Lamour in 1942 and quickly dubbed 'The Eagles' Nest'.

However, for a band steeped in the shamanistic teachings of Carlos Castaneda and his wandering medicine man Don Juan, the Eagles' lofty perch wasn't an excuse to sit back and admire the view. Rather, it was an opportunity to assert their dominance. "There is a scene in Castaneda in which Don Juan tells him to walk until he finds his power spot," Glenn Frey told *Time* magazine in August 1975. "After searching for hours, he collapses. He wakes up to find Don Juan, who laughs and tells him that he has found his spot. We all wandered around with different bands, but as the Eagles we have found our power spot."

Released in June 1975, the Eagles' fourth album provided the proof. A streamlined fusion of country ballads and freeway-friendly rock, elevated by the spun harmonies of Henley, Frey and Randy Meisner and infused with the heady aromas of Southern California, it provided the catalyst for all their future success. While it alluded to the past – the easy-going feel and effortless harmonies were worthy of The Everly Brothers – *One Of These Nights*' expansive sound pointed to the future, laying down the blueprint for the freeway-friendly AOR sound of Journey, Boston and Foreigner which would dominate US radio in the late '70s and early '80s.

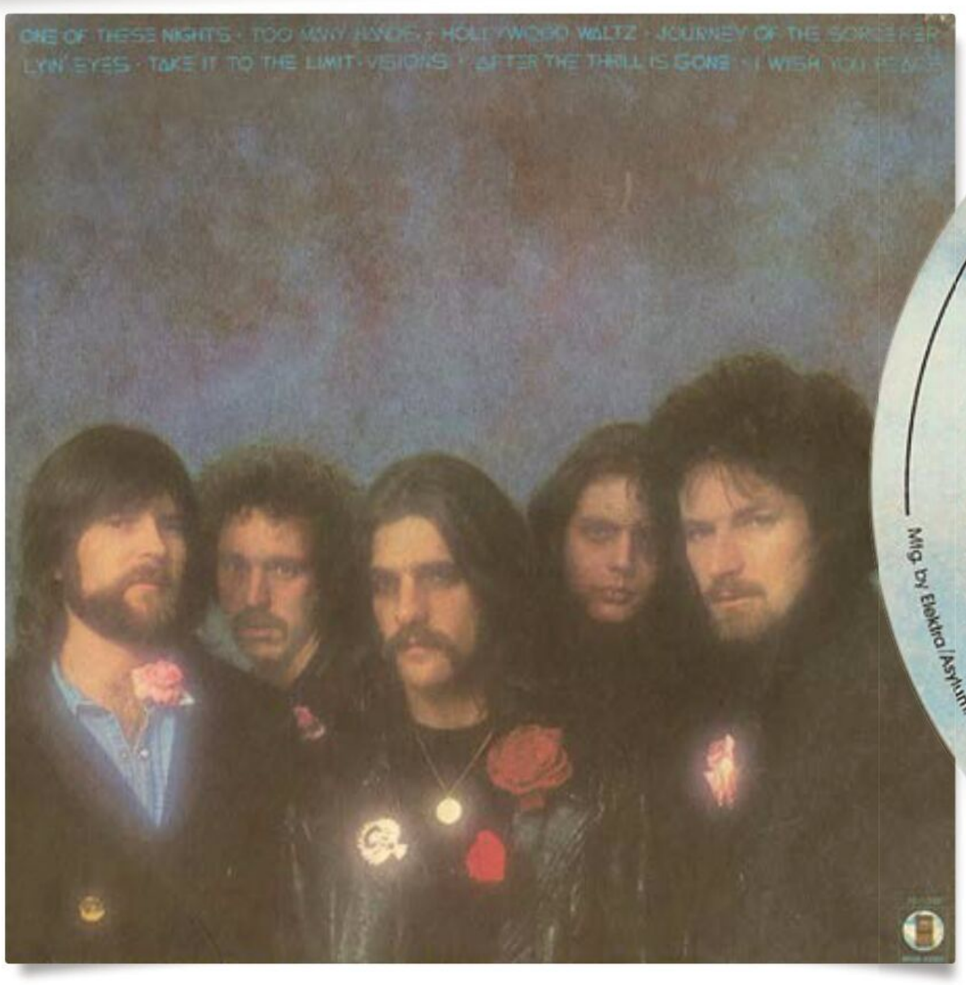
Lyrically, it spoke to a generation drained by the militancy of the '60s, who saw their own aspirations for the future mirrored in songs which combined the eternal allure of California with the romance of the open road, tapping into the national psyche – an American Dream dating back via the pages of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* to F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

> **"When Felder plays slide, the whole thing revolves around him"**
> **GLENN FREY**

A key component in this move up through the musical gears was Don Felder. His slide guitar instantly added extra muscle to the group's live show – specifically the second half dedicated to their more rock-orientated material. "He's like Duane Allman," explained Frey of their new recruit at the time. "He drives the band on certain songs. Some slide players, myself included, just slide along with the song, but when Felder plays slide he drives the band and the whole thing revolves around him."

With the almost pathologically driven Frey and Henley eager to pursue this more commercially lucrative rock direction on their next album, the new lineup began work on what would become *One Of These Nights* in late 1974. Working collaboratively in groups of two or three, they tried out between 15 and 20 song ideas, with Henley and Felder embarking on four cross-country trips, racking up a $160,000 production bill over three months without tangible results. Frey and Henley's sessions, however, were far more productive. Working through the winter months at their rented nest on Briarcrest Lane in Bel Air, they worked methodically on songs which would appeal to a mass audience. As obsessive as any of New York's great Brill Building duos, they spent the evenings drinking tequila in their favourite booth at Dan Tana's restaurant on Sunset Strip – writing lyrics on cocktail napkins when inspiration struck. ▶

EAGLES
One Of These Nights


ONE OF THESE NIGHTS · TOO MANY HANDS · HOLLYWOOD WALTZ · JOURNEY OF THE SORCERER
LYIN' EYES · TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT · VISIONS · AFTER THE THRILL IS GONE · I WISH

ASYLUM RECORDS
SIDE ONE
STEREO
7E-1039-A
(CSM)
EAGLES
ONE OF THESE NIGHTS
1. ONE OF THESE NIGHTS (D. Henley/G. Frey) 4:51
2. TOO MANY HANDS (R. Meisner/D. Felder) 4:42
3. HOLLYWOOD WALTZ 4:04
(B. Leadon/T. Leadon/D. Henley/G. Frey)
4. JOURNEY OF THE SORCERER (B. Leadon) 6:39
All songs published by Benchmark Music &
Kicking Bear Music ASCAP
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Records
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"We agonise over every lyric," explained Frey of their meticulous working process. "We analyse every 'and' and 'the' and 'but'. It's like buildin' a table, an' then once it's built, deciding how much time you want to spend sanding and glazing it."

Having converted a music room to a full-on recording studio, the pair drew added inspiration from the house's hilltop position, which offered 360-degree vistas in all directions, with snow-covered mountains to the east and the dazzling azure of the Pacific to the west. At night, the house provided panoramic views of the twinkling lights of Los Angeles below them, providing inspiration for the song which would prove to be both the album's title track and one of rock's most timeless compositions.

Written by Frey on the piano, "One Of These Nights" was both anxious and anticipatory. Drenched in the promise of hot Southern nights —its vision of a city full of "*lost and lonely people*" conjured up a phantasmagorical image of both amoral night-time LA and a country at a crossroads, poised "*somewhere between the dark and the light*" – it tapped into a post-Watergate mood of resignation. "It was a dark time, both politically and musically," said Henley later of their thought process behind the song. "We wanted to capture the spirit of the times."

"It was a dark time, both politically and musically"
DON HENLEY

Instantly aware that they had something special, in December 1974 the Eagles headed to Studio 'C' at Criteria Studios in Miami with trusted producer Bill Szymczyk to start work on the track. Putting their faith in Szymczyk to achieve the soul-influenced sound they were after – an R&B obsessive, he had engineered sessions for Aaron Neville and BB King – they laid down a sultry groove which reflected Frey's admiration for Al Green and Philadelphia soul icons Gamble and Huff, while nodding to the disco craze sweeping the mainstream.

However, with Randy Meisner stranded in Cleveland en route from Nebraska owing to a snowstorm, an impatient Frey and Henley asked new recruit Felder if he could fill in.

"We wanted to at least cut a demo, so we gave Felder the bass, and he wrote the bass part," recalled Frey. "It was so good on the demo he had to teach it to Randy. It took him two days to get him to play it the way Felder did."

Having added drone guitars and Felder's biting solo in Los Angeles, the group returned to Miami in March 1975 to lay down the vocals. Recording as a full ensemble around a single microphone to achieve a natural feel – sometimes doing the same phrase for three hours until it was perfect – the requisite stardust was provided by Henley and Meisner's falsetto harmonies. Possibly influenced by the presence of the Bee Gees in the studio next door – who were recording "Jive Talkin'" as part of their own successful rebranding – the result would shape the rest of the Eagles' career.

"We made a quantum leap with 'One Of These Nights'," recalled Frey. "It was a breakthrough song. It is my favourite Eagles record. If I ever had to pick one, it wouldn't be 'Hotel California', it wouldn't be 'Take It Easy'. For me, it would be 'One Of These Nights'."

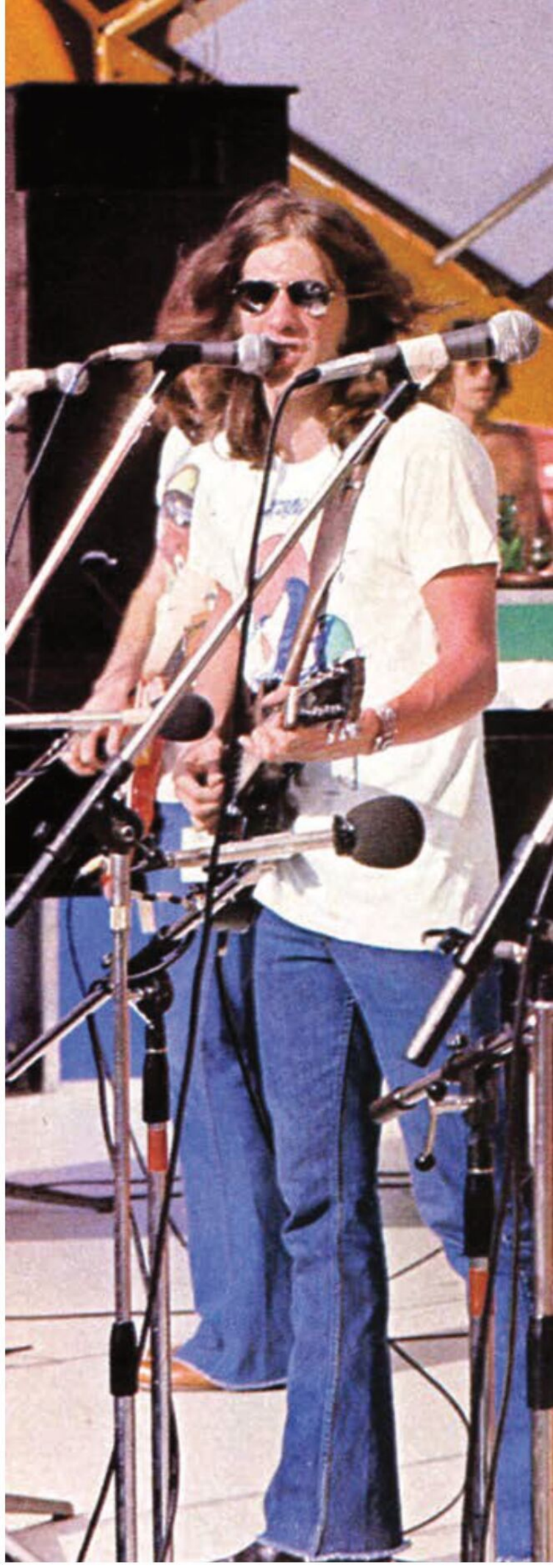
With the title track in the bag, the band set to work on the rest of the tracks earmarked for the new record, four written by Henley and Frey, at the Record Plant studios in LA. Recording each instrument simultaneously, with very few overdubs, they added percussion and melodic flourishes sparingly to prevent it getting, as Felder put it, "too dry... it loses that spark of magic". This kinetic feel is clear from an electrifying "Too Many Hands". A driving acoustic blues written by Felder and Meisner, with the latter contributing lyrics addressing the environmental toll of man on Mother Nature ("*She's one of a kind/Sometimes hard to find/She's a rainbow*"), it's a powerful reminder of the Eagles' songwriting depth and stealth with an ecological subtext.

If a pedal-steel and mandolin-assisted "Hollywood Waltz" is a misty-eyed ode to the group's adopted hometown, an acacia-scented "*dreamland*" where "*business is booming*", "Journey Of The Sorcerer" is more other-worldly. An eerie six-and-a-half-minute blast of cosmic country showcasing the banjo-twanging virtuosity of Bernie Leadon, its ethereal feel caught the ear of novelist Douglas Adams, who chose it as the theme music for the radio transmission of sci-fi classic *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* in 1978 (it was also later used for both the BBC TV series and the 2005 film adaptation).

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"If the Eagles are ever going to sell records in vast quantities over here, this has to be the album that breaks the ice. And as it happens, *One Of These Nights*, released simultaneously in Americe and Britain on June 20, is probably the band's first wrong step... A lot of that characteristic Eagles freshness still evident on *On The Border* has disappeared... moreover they've gone in for an even more commercial approach here, to the extent where some of the music comes across as self-parody."
STEVE CLARKE, NME, JUNE 14, 1975

"That this contains good, melodic, sharp, attractive and telling songs there is no doubt, but somehow it has not got the same instant quality as the rest of their work... Their past high achievements put this one slightly in the shade... But ...*Nights* is an album which grows on you after repeated hearings and maybe as time goes on, a couple of these songs will join the list of Eagles greats."
ESDALE MACLEAN, MELODY MAKER, JUNE 28, 1975



GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

The bluegrass feel continues with the sublime "Lyin' Eyes". Written over two days by Frey, inspired by an incident at Dan Tana's where he witnessed a wealthy older man dining with a much younger woman, it shines a light, over six intoxicating minutes, on the city's darker side – specifically the incarcerating effect of wealth on its inhabitants. Opening with the lines, "*City girls just seem to find out early/How to open doors with just a smile*", Frey tells the story of the central character's unhappy relationship with a "*rich old man*", with her own self-destructive urges a reaction to the gilded cage she has found herself in: "*She gets up and pours herself a strong one/And stares out at the stars up in the sky*".

Worked up in the studio by Henley and Frey from an idea which came to Randy Meisner late one night after a performance at the Troubadour, "Take It To The Limit" epitomised the

Together in blue jeans: the Eagles show out in the sunshine, circa 1975

Eagles' collaborative approach. A tear-jerking country waltz sent stratospheric by Meisner's soaring vocal and the contribution of guest pianist Jim Ed Norman, its climactic outro – where Meisner hits notes which Frey drily remarked "could only be heard by dogs" – was inspired by producer Szymczyk's love of Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes' ballad "If You Don't Know Me By Now".

IF the storming "Visions" is hampered by Felder's lead vocal being buried in the mix, "After The Thrill Is Gone" offers further proof of Henley and Frey's growing confidence as songwriters. A tacit acknowledgement that the intertwining of their personal and professional lives has its drawbacks, it's a bittersweet comment on fame, the duo taking turns to sing verses before Frey sighs, "*Any kind of love without passion/Well, that ain't no kind of lovin' at all*".

Another glimpse of the Eagles' complex internal workings comes with the syrupy last track "I Wish You Peace". Written by Bernie Leadon and then-girlfriend Patti Davis as a peace offering following an incident where Leadon poured a glass of beer over Frey's head following a dispute over the band's direction, it was only included as a sop to the guitarist, and was later dismissed by Henley as "smarmy cocktail music".

Released in June 1975, *One Of These Nights*' success – three Top 10 US singles, four million sales and three Grammy nominations – provided complete validation for Frey and Henley's iron grip on the band's musical direction. Leadon left the band shortly afterwards, paving the way for the recruitment of Joe Walsh and a move further away from the band's country roots towards a more commercially viable rock sound. The Eagles' time in the "power spot" was just beginning. *One Of These Nights* had proved they were on their way to capturing the wistful spirit of California in the '70s as successfully as The Beach Boys had in the previous decade.

Their next studio album, however, would help to immortalise the Golden State in rock history forever.

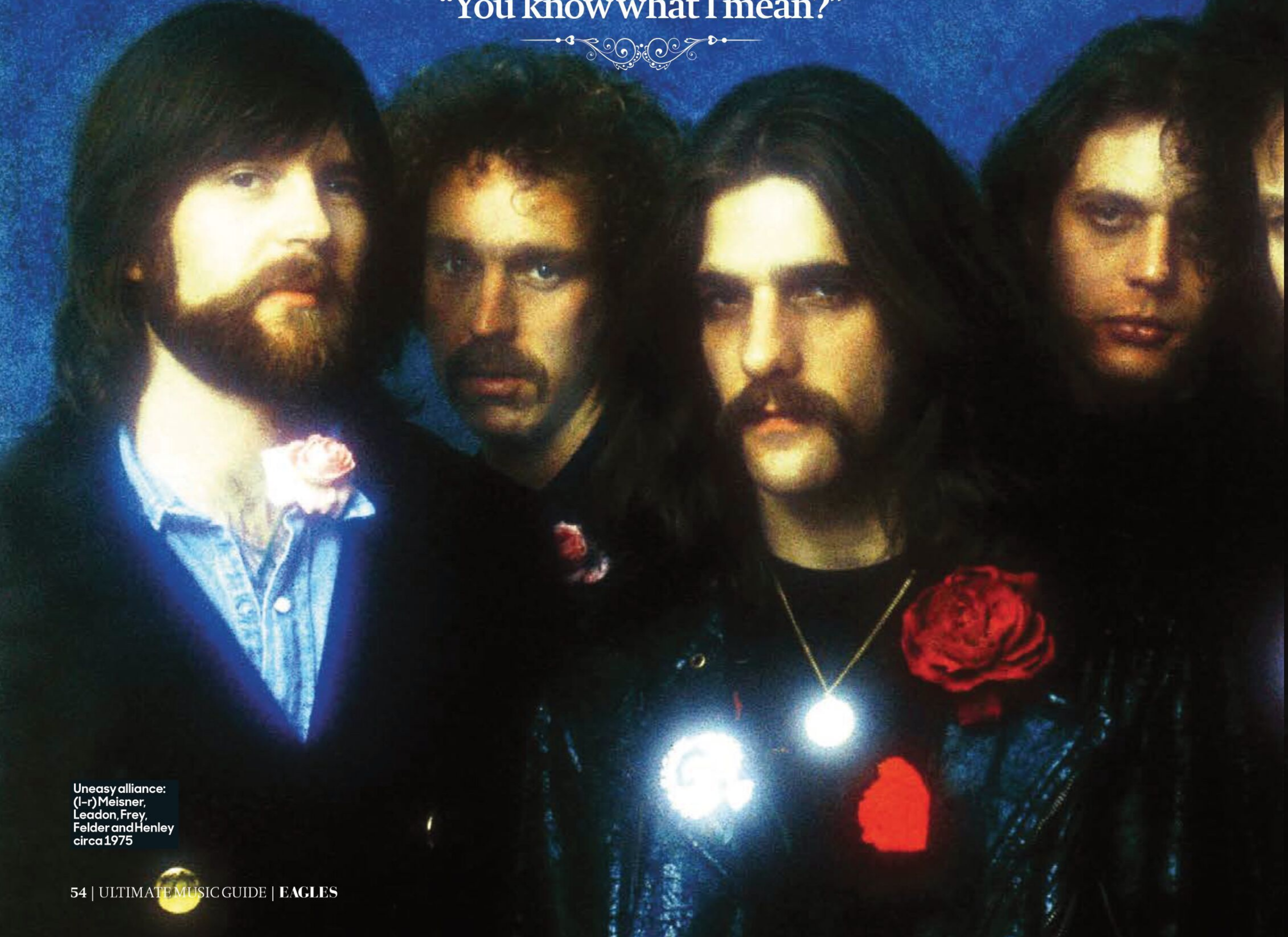
SLEEVE NOTES ONE OF THESE NIGHTS

1 One Of These Nights ★★★★★
2 Too Many Hands ★★★★
3 Hollywood Waltz ★★★
4 Journey Of The Sorcerer ★★★★
5 Lyin' Eyes ★★★★
6 Take It To The Limit ★★★★
7 Visions ★★★
8 After The Thrill Is Gone ★★★
9 I Wish You Peace ★★

LABEL: Asylum
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Criteria Studios, Miami; Record Plant, Los Angeles
PERSONNEL: Glenn Frey (vocals, guitars, piano, electric piano, harmonium), Don Henley (vocals, drums, percussion, tabla), Bernie Leadon (vocals, bass guitar), Randy Meisner (vocals, bass guitar), Don Felder (vocals, guitars, slide guitar), Jim Ed Norman (piano), David Bromberg (fiddles), Albhy Galuten (synthesiser), The Royal Martian Orchestra (strings)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 8; US 1

"A CERTAIN WESTERN CHARISMA"

Evolving slowly, with a close circle of like-minded people, the EAGLES are on the point of greatness. Their close associate Joe Walsh continues to search for a career path post the James Gang and "Funk #49" – where will he end up? *NME*, meanwhile, learns that things are more highly strung in the Eagles than their mellow sounds might suggest. "I love Bernie Leadon and I hate Bernie Leadon," DON HENLEY tells STEVE CLARKE. "You know what I mean?"



Uneasy alliance: (l–r) Meisner, Leadon, Frey, Felder and Henley circa 1975

MELODY MAKER APRIL 12, 1975

HOLLYWOOD: On a clear day Glenn Frey can see from his living room right out to sea, right across the Pacific to Catalina, the island off the coast of Southern California. On a not-so-clear day, he can see layers of orange smog, the product of the internal combustion engine, which is God in this part of America.

Today is clear and the view is quite breathtaking. Certainly conducive to writing those typical LA soft rock melodies with which the Eagles have become synonymous.

It doesn't take a fortune teller to predict that 1975 is going to be the big year for the Eagles. They've been clicking their boot heels for three years now, steadily building a reputation in the wake of The Byrds, waiting for the breakthrough that their third album, *On The Border*, has seemingly now brought about.

Although it's easing down the charts right now, it's established the band as a force to be reckoned with.

"*On The Border* was the best-sounding record we ever made, but that's also experience. We're starting to learn how to become recording artists, which is a little different from learning how to be a member of a band or how to become a singer/songwriter.

"There're definitely things we've learned slowly over a couple of years of making records. I know when we made *Desperado* we were very conscious of having a group identity running through the songs and that was something we learned out of doing the first album.

"After doing that one, when we went in to do *On The Border* we tried to bring in the best elements from both the albums. That probably had something to do with it, but I think it was a better album anyway. I think we just progressed and played with a little more confidence. But mainly I think it's that we stayed together."

Another factor which Frey credits as being important to the group's recent success is the introduction of Don Felder on slide guitar. Felder, says Frey, put extra punch into the Eagles' live show with the added result that they picked up more followers. "I believe in selling records on the road, and I believe that if you work hard and have a good album out, it will sell.

"Since we got Felder in the band we've had a much better second half, the rock and roll half, in our shows. The other part, the vocal harmony softer part, was always real good, but Felder nails down the harder stuff. He's like Duane Allman: he drives the band on certain songs. Some slide players, myself included, just slide along with the song, but when Felder plays slide he drives the band and the whole thing revolves around him. So the year that we promoted *On The Border* we had a much better show together."

Desperado was a concept album in as much as many of the tunes dealt with the old West. It seemed curious, I remarked, that a band would travel to England from America to make that kind of record.

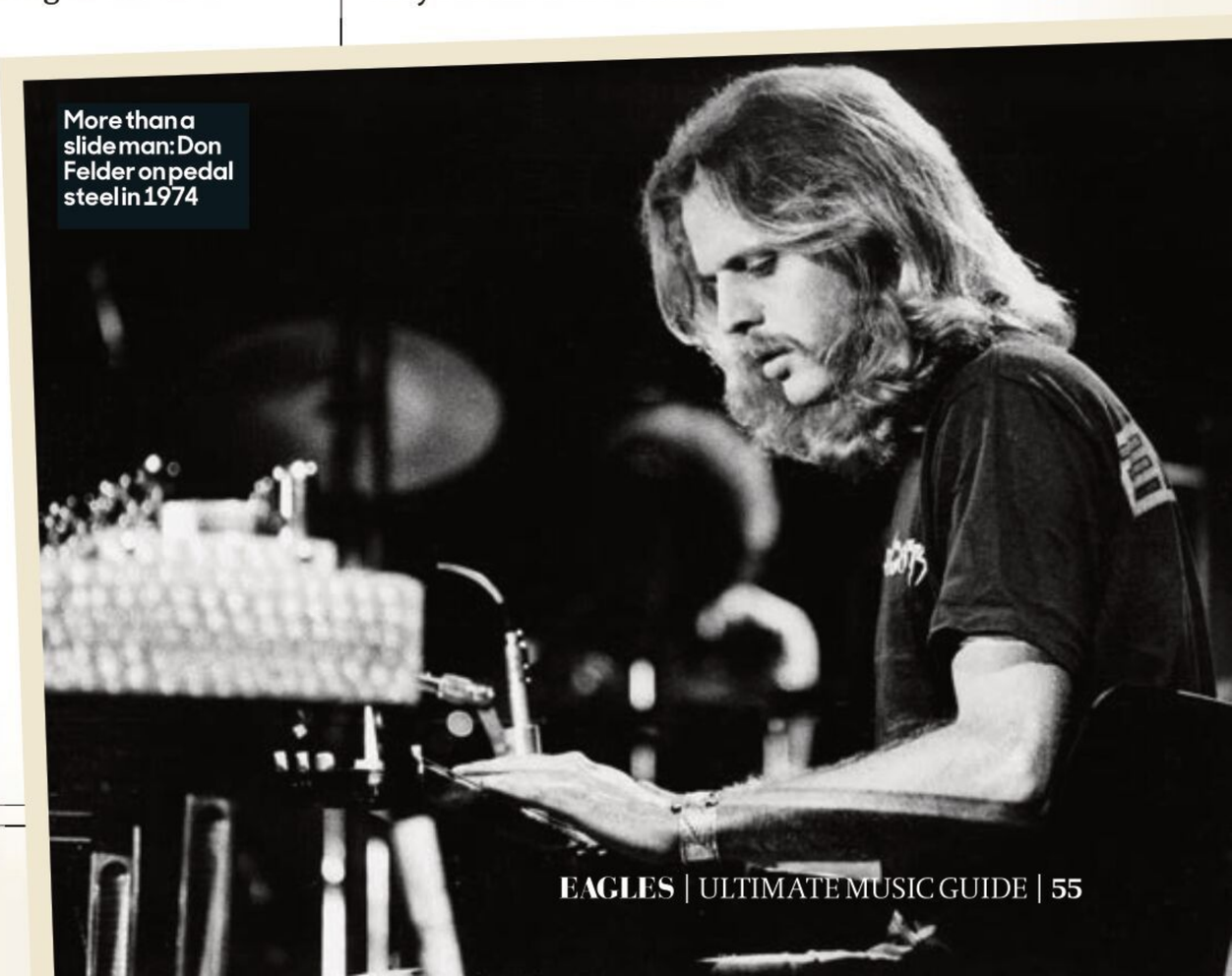
"Well," mused Glenn. "I guess you're right, but Clint Eastwood made all those cowboy movies of his in Italy [*sic: predominantly in Spain, with an Italian director*]. Some of the best Western movies have been made in Europe. You get a whole new perspective working in England.

"All of a sudden you're a foreigner, and it put us and LA and everything into perspective. Now I like staying here, although we tried going to Miami for part of this new album. We got some stuff accomplished there but not nearly as much as we did recording here."

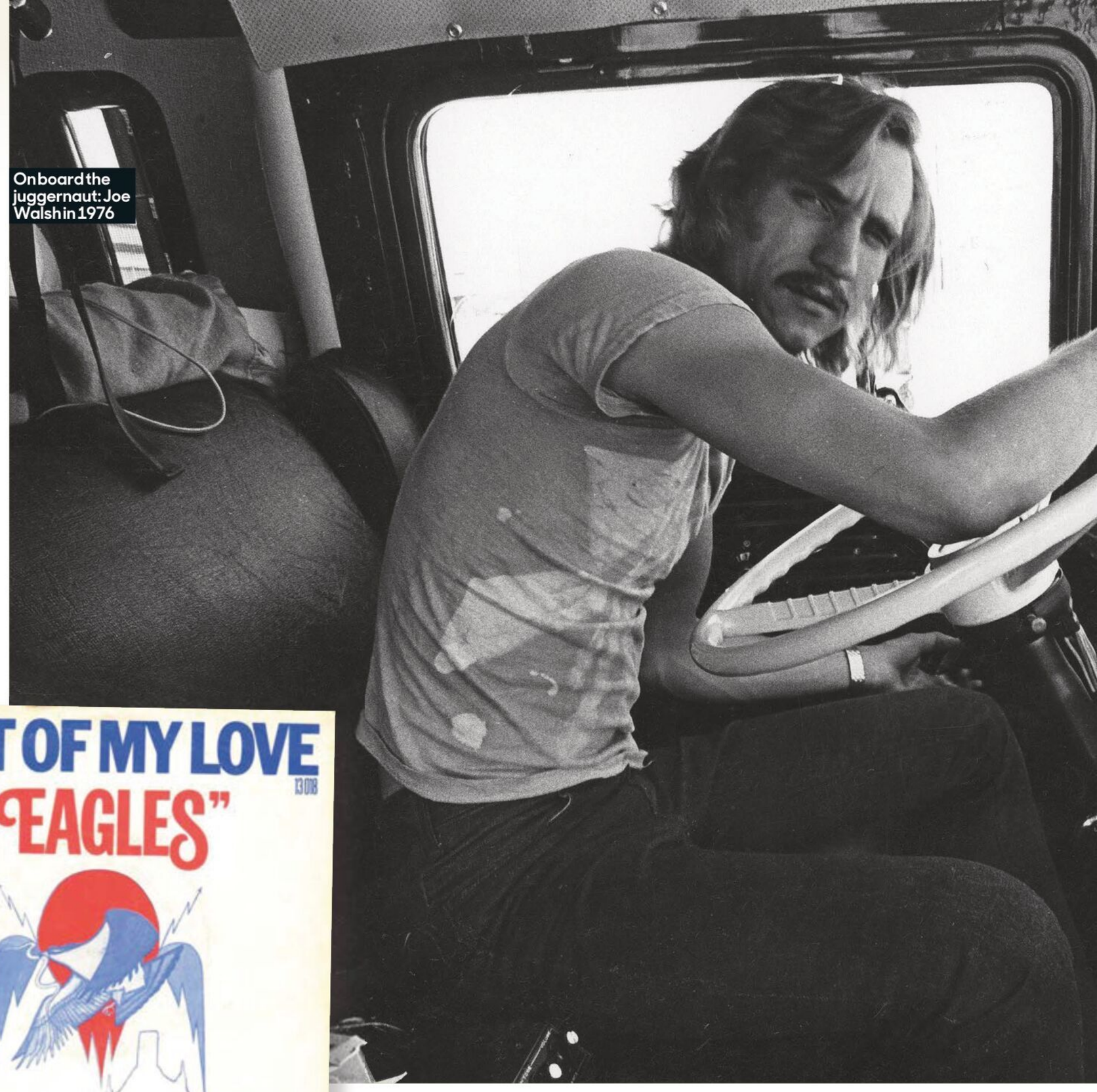
Another factor which possibly aided the success of the last album was their decision to tour with some of the material before it was put down on tape. Thus not only were audiences already familiar with the tracks, but the band had an opportunity to work on them before they reached the studio.

"You get a whole new perspective working in England. All of a sudden you're a foreigner"
GLENN FREY

RB/REDFERNS, GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS



More than a slide man: Don Felder on pedal steel in 1974



On board the juggernaut: Joe Walsh in 1976

"I think we did about five songs on a college tour," said Glenn. "We were out there testing them, mixing them in with the better-known songs. I think it's good to do it that way sometimes because it forces you to make a presentation immediately.

"It forces you to give a rendering immediately, so vocal parts get simplified, and backing parts and guitar parts get honed down to what you can do best to present the song. By the time we get to the studio there's a whole basic sketch already done.

"With this next album we haven't done that, but again this album so far is nothing but our own songs. On the others we usually included a song by another writer or called in a friend like Jackson [*Browne*] or John David [*Souther*] to help on a track. We may do that in the next two weeks, though.

"This is maybe a reason why it's taking longer to make than other albums, but another reason is that Don Henley and I are trying to change the traditional symbolic rock'n'roll lyrics that most people use on albums.

"The songs have been finished for a while but we've sat around thinking whether we ought to change them. All we have to do now is to go in and sing the parts, and that's when it'll begin to sound like an Eagles record. Whenever I hear backing tracks, I can't think of it being the Eagles at all, a long way from 'Peaceful Easy Feeling'."

Last summer the Eagles backed Neil Young at an Indian benefit concert near San Francisco, an experience which may be repeated this year, and one which Frey recollects with more than a little pride.

"The guy that put it together was our art director, and he knows the native California Indians and he approached Neil Young, who said he'd do it. He didn't commit himself until three or four days before the concert, though, because he didn't want it to be advertised.

"We had a great jam on 'Cowgirl In The Sand' with me and Felder and Neil trading solos for about 12 minutes. We hope to make it an annual event as we're doing another one this May. I'm into doing things for them because I figure we're living on their land even if I don't have one iota of guilt about it.

"The Indians knew how to live here properly and a lot of people are starting to think this way and realise their Old West consciousness. I'm into the western civilisation mysticism. Over here people are always turning to the east, but I figure it's all right here if we want to look for it.

"I'm sure some of this Indian and Mexican influence was with us when we were doing *Desperado*, as we had a great time doing the little links between songs, the banjo and traditional things. I would like to do another concept album, though I'm not sure what the premise would be."

"I would like to do another concept album… I'm not sure what the premise would be"
GLENN FREY

Frey's song "Best Of My Love" undoubtedly gave *On The Border* sales a boost. It was, he says, an attempt to work off a guitar tuning that Joni Mitchell had demonstrated. "Actually, I got into a totally different tuning and that's how the song ended up.

"I had a little help from John David Souther, who worked on the bridge and rang me up from LA when I was in England to play it over the phone. We actually worked on it over the phone until he came to England to see us. 'Cry Like A Lover' came about the same way, working on the phone over all that distance."

Collaboration with other LA musicians is a way of life in California, as can usually be detected by reading album credits as well as noticing various similarities in the actual music.

"On songwriting, I do it all the time," admits Frey. "If I get something I can't finish by myself it's always good to take it to someone else. We collaborate among ourselves, but Souther helps us out sometimes.

"It's not so much calling up for help in an emergency as just calling and suggesting we spend an evening writing together and picking up on fragments. The funny thing that we find with the guys in the Eagles and Souther and Jackson is how much we think alike. Whenever anyone plays something, we tend to pick on it right away."

This summer the Eagles are making their first trip to England in over 18 months. They're tentatively scheduled to appear with Elton John at Wembley Stadium on June 21 along with stablemate Joe Walsh.

"What I like about playing in England," said Frey as we drew to a close, "is the attentiveness of the audience. In America we tend to play to very boisterous crowds, but in England they sit and listen and I just thrive on that.

"We found when we played our first ever gigs in England that being American helped us. Being an American unknown in America is a drag, but being an American unknown in England is cool. We found we had a certain amount of Western charisma. I didn't realise it until people started looking at my cowboy boots and asking where I got them."

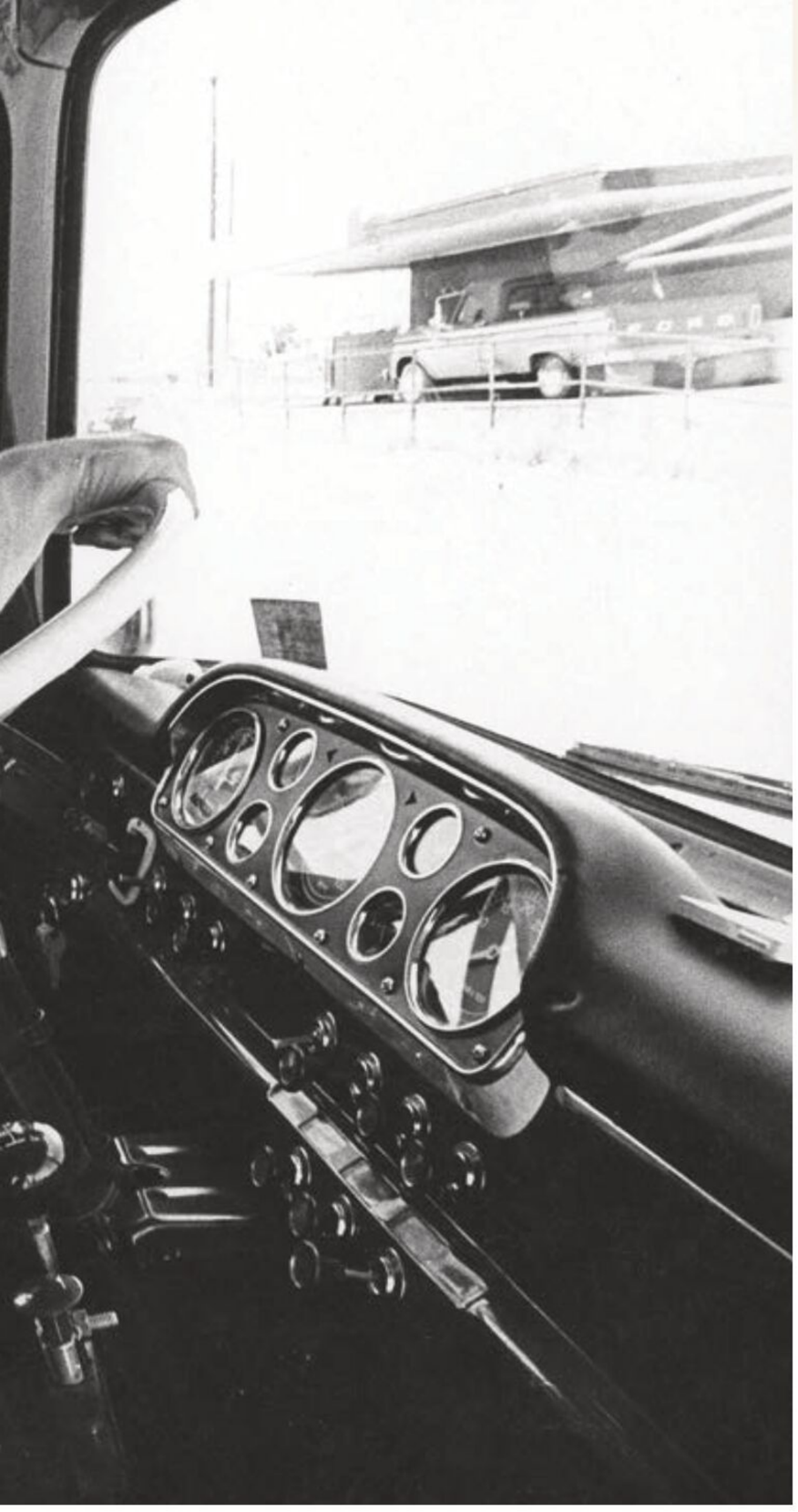
CHRIS CHARLESWORTH

MELODY MAKER APRIL 12, 1975

DES MOINES: It has to be a coincidence. Affixed to a light switch close to the door of Joe Walsh's dressing room at the Veterans Auditorium in this sleepy Midwest town is a sticker that reads: "James Gang... Bang." There are no other stickers, posters or rock paraphernalia in the room.

"Mmmm, that's a weird one," agrees Joe, who lopes around the room pulling on a coke and

PETER SHERMAN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



ice, and treating a spinning blackboard with more than a little contempt. "Fancy THAT sticker being on this wall," he murmurs darkly before ambling away into another, smaller room to attend to the tuning of two Gibson Les Pauls.

Slightly over one hour later Joe is back in the dressing room, disappointed that the show didn't gel as he had hoped. "Awww shit," he repeats and blames his misfortunes on the monitor system. "The crowd was up, real up to it, but we couldn't hear a thing. I just wanna get outta here."

The new Joe Walsh band is a mellower group than Barnstorm, a group obviously more dedicated to intricacies of electric sound, melodies and subleties. There are two keyboard players, not counting Joe himself, who sits at a grand piano for at least one number on stage.

Ricky Fataar, the drummer, is a solid player. His spell with the Beach Boys taught him discipline, if not adventure. Bryan Garofalo is an utterly proficient bassist of the studio variety, who effortlessly pumps out line after line without thought or hesitation. The two keyboard players, David Mason and Paul Harris, are somewhat anonymous, hiding behind banks of organ and keyboard cabinets at stage right.

It's Walsh who's the star, a slowhand cowboy of the fretboard, whose style can be reckoned to be a cross between Townshend and Clapton. There's none of Pete's violence, but plenty of chunky chord work, and his solo lines seem to flow in Clapton's oozing fashion. He also plays with disarming ease: he doesn't belong to the school of players who believe in screwing up their faces to attract attention.

The new band – the first to go out as simply Joe Walsh – was born around six months ago. Garofalo has replaced Passarelli in the latter stages of Barnstorm – Walsh's old band – so he was a natural choice, while Fataar had often discussed with Walsh the possibility of a link-up at some time in the future. David Mason was a friend of the Eagles (who share the same management company as Joe) and he readily agreed to accept the job.

"It was a strain getting a whole new group together, as Brian was the only one remotely familiar with playing my material live. It seemed like the millionth time I'd taught 'Funk #49' to somebody, so trying to put new energy into it and keep it fresh was a struggle. With new players seeing it differently it often does put new energy into a song, so I didn't mind the struggle that much."

Last to join was Paul Harris, an old friend of Joe's from James Gang days and a former session colleague. "The four-piece worked well except that I felt I needed a little more melodic content. Four hands on the keyboard seemed to really fill it out nicely."

The *So What* album was mainly Joe's work, though two tracks were put down by the old Barnstorm, and Garofalo took care of the bass work. During the recordings, the new band had yet to be recruited.

"It was the first time I've ever been alone in the studio and although it was good, I probably won't want to do it again. I guess I wanted to get the quote – solo – unquote, album out of my system. It's about one third a group and two-thirds solo.

"In the studio I'll give everybody a chance to create and add whatever is in their heads. I try and be be fair to everybody otherwise the band gets weak. If you don't give a band more involvement then they don't add more involvement. Unless other musicians can relate and add to what's going down then it can't be a group. I don't think I've ever hit the chemistry yet. Barnstorm was real close though."

The new group, says Joe, has the potential to be his best yet though this stage hasn't been reached. They are playing material from all the stages of Joe's career right back from the James Gang.

"Unless other musicians can relate and add to what's going down then it can't be a group"
JOE WALSH

"It's a kind of cross-section of me up to date. The tunes change a bit and that's interesting as we get together different players to play the same songs. I don't think the audience would let me phase out the older material, though I would love to not play 'Funk #49' any more. I feel they've paid to come and hear the record and I owe it to them to play that.

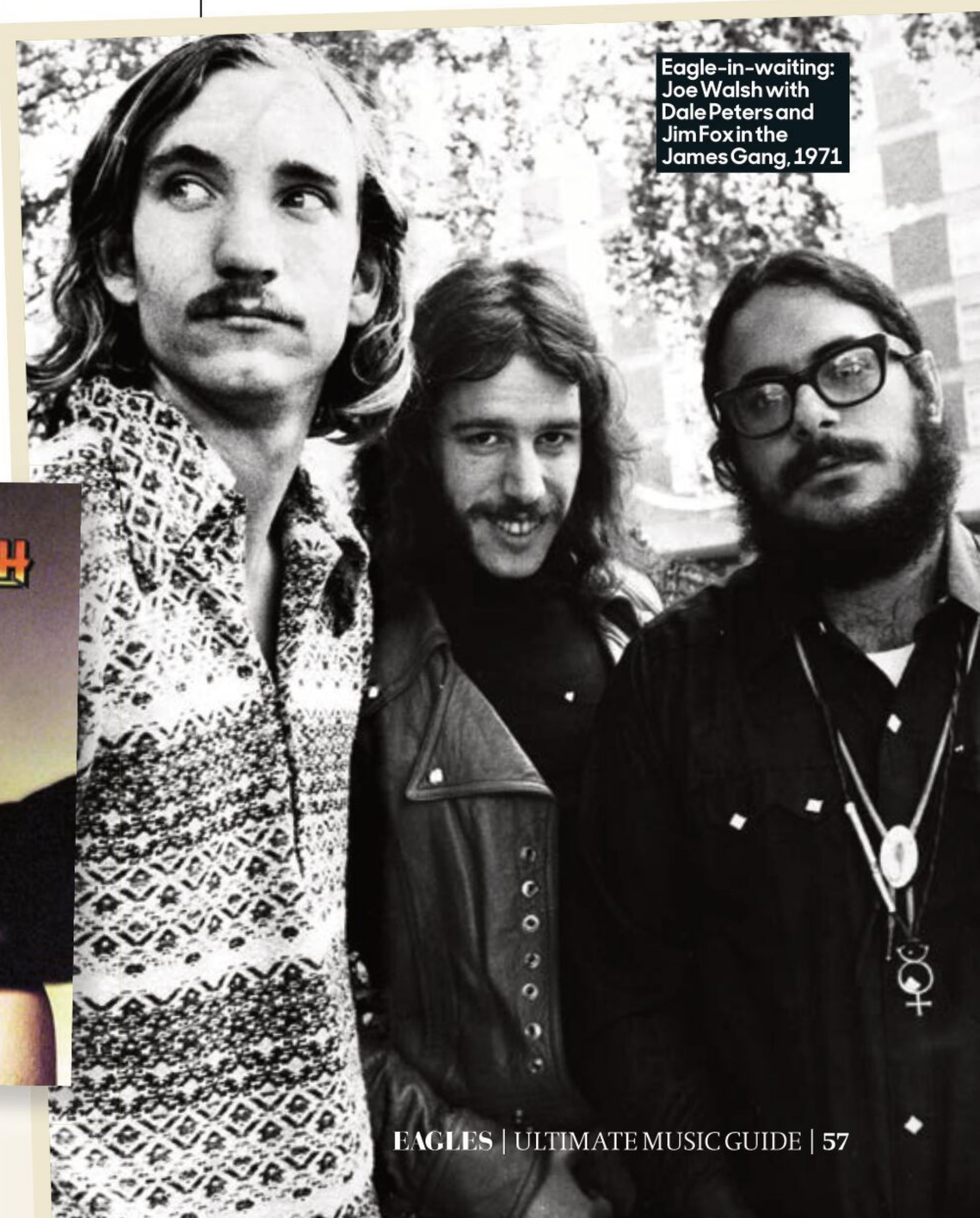
"One of the strengths of the concert is that we do have a catalogue of songs that people recognise and want to hear. Going out and playing all new songs is risky. Eventually I may phase out some of the old stuff but so far everybody is hollering for it and I don't want to let them down."

Joe acknowledges with some bemusement that he is becoming a guitar hero, but lays the blame on his days in the James Gang, which was a guitar-fronted trio.

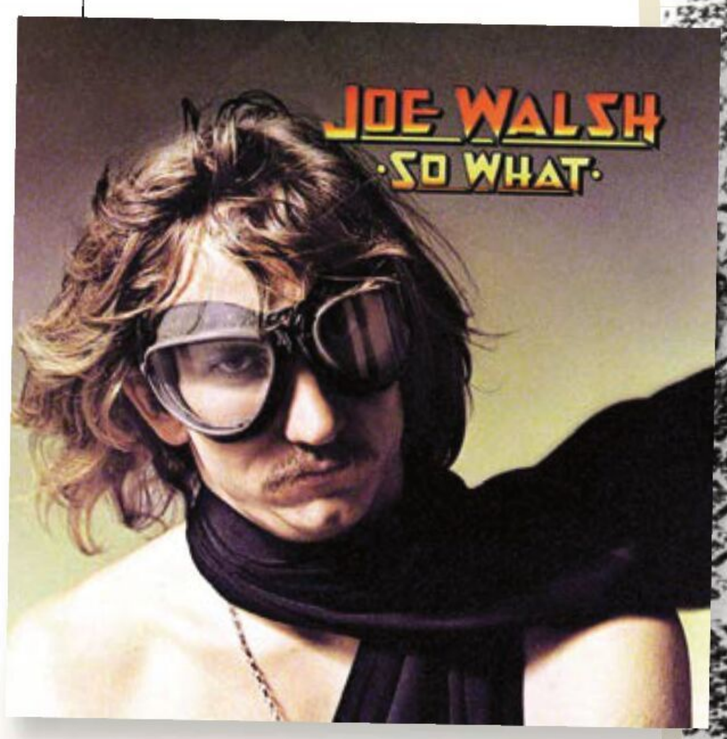
"I just had to be inventive when there was just one guitar. When you stop playing lead there was no more lead, and when you stop playing rhythm there was no more rhythm. You learn a technique to compensate for that and that stage was when I really sat down and studied rock technique on the guitar. Now it's nice to apply all that with a much fuller group."

Joe's most recent activity has been a move into production, and a successful one at that. ➤

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE



Eagle-in-waiting: Joe Walsh with Dale Peters and Jim Fox in the James Gang, 1971



He produced Dan Fogelberg's *Souvenirs* album which reached the US Top 20.

"I've always wanted to produce but I never thought I could," says Joe. "I didn't think I was ready and I was having enough trouble getting my own things on tape without worrying about anybody else's. But at some point I figured it was time to try, and I was interested in Dan because I really related to his music.

"It's hard to say what a producer does because so many producers do different things. I just tried to be an extension of Fogelberg in whatever way he needed it. I think I proved to myself and some others that I can produce, but it was just good to try it once and I don't want to go and make a career out of producing. Not yet, anyway. I think I've got some more of my own career left in me.

"Another couple of years yet, I think."

CHRIS CHARLESWORTH

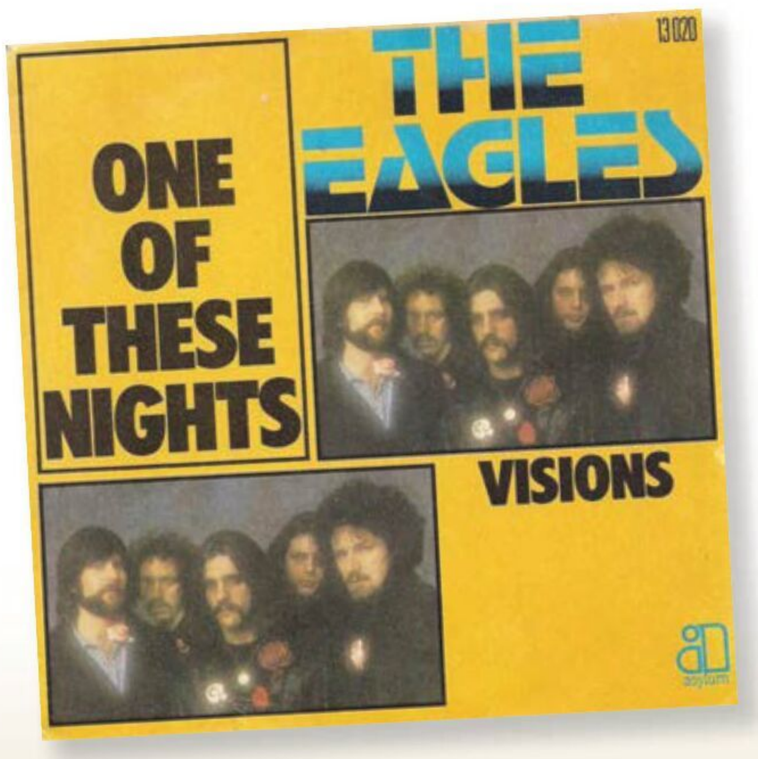
NME JUNE 28, 1975

AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS, 1975

WE'RE sitting in a bar more or less opposite from Rotterdam's Hilton hotel, Elektra-Asylum's press officer Monty Smith and me. Elektra-Asylum (the label comes under EMI's wing in Britain, but when the contract expires very soon it's more than likely EMI'll no longer distribute the label over here) have flown me to Holland to see the Eagles perform at the city's Ahoy Halle, thinking that the Dutch gig'll put the group in a more favourable light than their Wembley, London gig some three days later.

There's also a faint chance that I'll get to talk to the Eagles, a rare occurrence by all accounts although the band'll be given the whole *Rolling Stone* cover job a couple of issues hence.

In fact the Eagles' drummer/singer/writer Don Henley has got word to Monty that he'd especially like to meet me after the review that appeared in this paper a couple of weeks ago of their new album *One Of These Nights*. Prior to hearing the *One Of These Nights* record I'd been an unreserved fan of the group, but on *One Of These Nights* it seemed as though they just weren't doing their best any more.



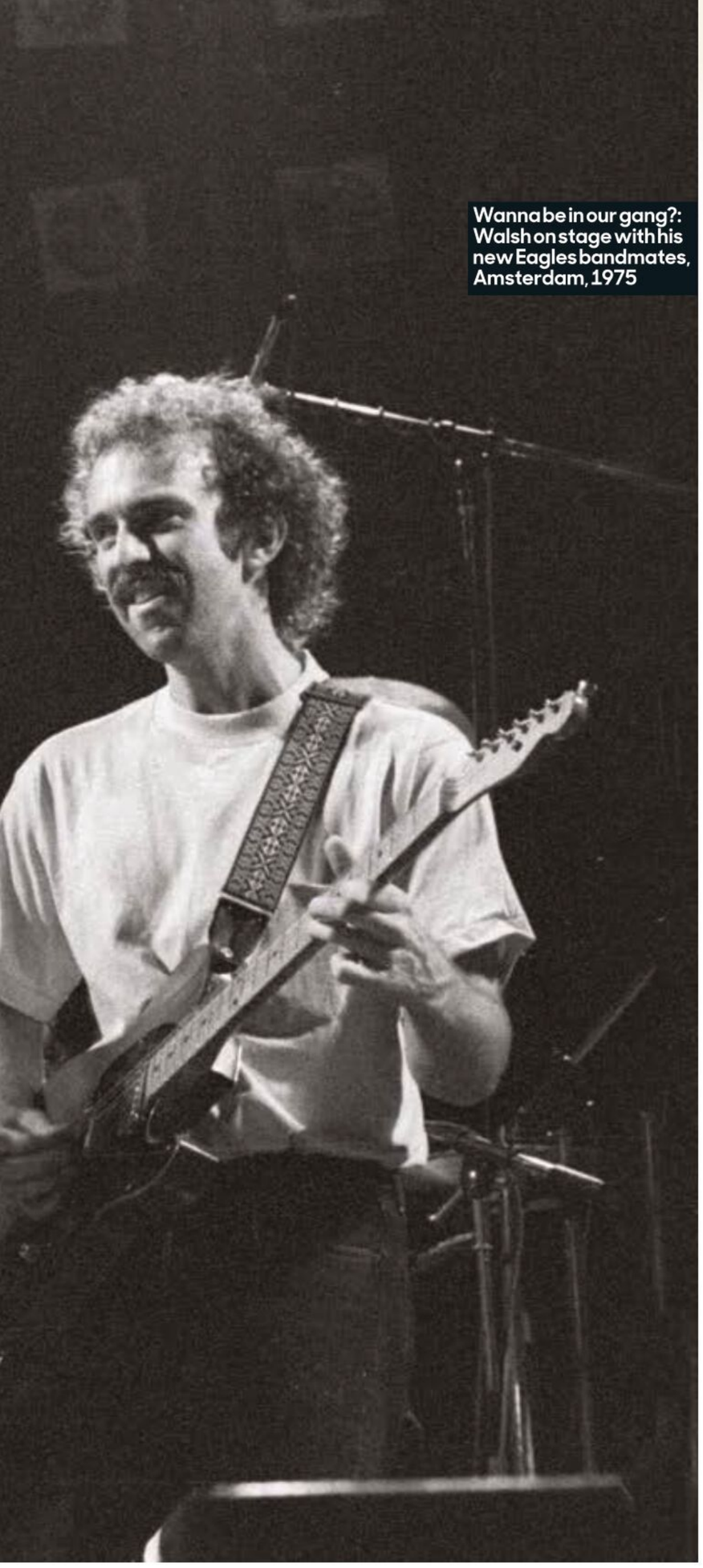
A few minutes later we're sitting around a dining table with Eagles' manager Irv Azoff, a bearded bespectacled gent, around five feet tall who also manages Joe Walsh (appearing with the Eagles at the Ahoy Halle), Dan Fogelberg and Minnie Riperton. Azoff is eating his dinner. He refers to me as the band's "ex favourite writer" and suggests that we drive on down to the gig with the Dutch promoter, a friendly enough gesture. But when the question of an interview comes up, he says it's right out after that review.

And when the Eagles do an interview all five have to participate otherwise those who don't get interviewed get jealous, a situation that arose when Henley and Glenn Frey (very much the band's leader judging from the subsequent gig) used to do all the interviews.

"We're not over here to make money. We're over here to sell a few records." says Azoff on the drive to the gig. "The Eagles are five times bigger than Walsh over here. In England they both sell about the same."

Azoff asks if we've seen the band before. No, says Monty. Yes, say I. Either way, he says, we'll be surprised at the difference guitarist Don Felder has made to the band.

The Ahoy Halle is a cycling stadium. And it shows backstage, where the dressing-rooms are fitted with all the facilities a Hugh Porter would desire. The atmosphere is very relaxed, not to mention casual as Walsh's band sit around waiting to go on.



Wanna be in our gang?: Walsh on stage with his new Eagles bandmates, Amsterdam, 1975

Monty and I have been directed towards Walsh's dressing room. But hang on. Isn't this an Eagle? Yes it's Don Henley, bedenimmed and tired after spending the previous night at Les Ambassadores, where he gambled away $2,500 with Elton John's mob playing blackjack (that's pontoon to you).

"You're the guy who got the facts wrong," are Henley's opening words. He explains what I got wrong and he's very serious about it all. "I'm trying not to be nasty," he says.

The main thing that bothers him is that I said it was Glenn Frey who sang lead vocal on the title track of *One Of These Nights* whereas it was Henley himself singing. But there's a couple of other things too, like where I said there were mandolins on the album whereas, in fact, the instrument being played was a 12-string guitar. Also I was wrong about "Too Many Hands".

"The song's about the planet," Henley duly explains. "It's not about a woman."

I thought it was about a woman, I say. One line goes "*There's 100 many hands being laid on her*". But the "*her*", on whom the hands are being laid, is the ecology. I think I apologised. Henley refuses to be drawn into conversation and wanders off to his dressing room.

Joe Walsh and band play the opening act. We're sitting in the front row. As Saturday's Wembley show proves, Walsh wasn't exactly giving his all at Rotterdam and his guitar playing was lost in the overall mix.

Backstage, Eagle Bernie Leadon (there's a story that Leadon got tired of being a pop star first, musician second and almost quit the band a year or so back) tunes his banjo. "We haven't played in 10 days. My fingers are out of shape and so is my voice."

It didn't really show in the band's subsequent set, since everything except for bassist Randy Meisner's voice was record perfect. It wasn't Meisner's fault. Something was wrong in the mix, causing his vocals to very nearly vanish.

Glenn Frey's first on stage, looking slightly athletic as he runs to pick up his guitar, wearing a sloppy baseball jersey with the figure nine emblazoned on the shirt's back.

Frey sings lead as the group go into an all-electric version of what amounts to their signature tune, "Take It Easy," Leadon playing a solo on Telecaster.

Frey switches to the grand piano left on the stage and the band play "Outlaw Man", a great rock'n'roll song from their *Desperado* album.

The Eagles are capable of performing their excellent songs with an admirable precision, yet they lack any real onstage presence or facility for projection. One gets the feeling they're merely going through the motions.

Fine moments aside, like their rendering of "Peaceful Easy Feeling", a love song from their first album, the set gets pegged at one level and goes on for far too long.

The audience response, needless to say, was ecstatic.

Azoff invites me up onstage for the last couple of encores "Best Of My Love" and "Tequila Sunrise", and a close look at the band gives me the impression that it is Leadon more than any of the others who is attracted by what they're doing onstage.

(The Eagles' Wembley set was a much superior performance. The show had more balance, climaxing with a particularly astonishing delivery of their No 1 American hit "Best Of My Love"... the vocal harmonies being a true intestinal joy.)

Frey seems in good spirits after the gig and after we're introduced he says. "I didn't mind your review."

How about an interview later? I ask, and he more or less agrees, saying, "I'll say yes to anything, especially to her..." pointing both retina in the direction of the golden-skinned blonde who's next to him.

"Come back to the bar at the hotel and we'll feel it out," Frey says, referring to an interview.

Azoff's hanging around outside in the corridor. I tell him that Glenn seems to be into doing an interview. "No way," says the manager, "If one of the group says they don't want to do an interview then there's no interview, and Don Henley doesn't want to talk to you."

I see.

Back at the Hilton, Monty approaches Henley again. Henley withdraws. We go on down to the hotel's discotheque where various members of Walsh's band are already ensconced. Drinks are ordered and it seems that the Eagles have either decided to take an early night or have slouched off to some other habitat to do their relaxing.

Less than 15 minutes later, Glenn Frey and I are discussing the new album and just why the group are so reluctant to do interviews. As regards *One Of These Nights*, Frey's attitude towards the review I'd written seems to have changed a little since our brief encounter after the gig.

He now defends the album, saying that every band should be allowed some self-indulgence now and again with particular reference to the six-minute-plus instrumental on the album "Journey Of The Sorcerer".

When it comes to the subject of interviews, he compares their attitude to Joni Mitchell's sentiment that it's all in the music, man. And despite her recalcitrance, Joni's albums will get in the charts. True enough.

Henley joins us and we proceed to make friends. He says that he did feel very bitter towards me but it's all better now. He appears very intense and drunk and suddenly discloses that members of the band don't get along too well. "I love Bernie Leadon and I hate Bernie Leadon. You know what I mean?" says Henley.

Fry returns to the table and I once again request a more formal interview, perhaps later in the week in London. Frey doesn't want to know, but Henley now seems keen to do an interview, saying not to take Frey's word as final on the interview situation.

Two days later at a party for the acts appearing at Wembley, Henley, Frey and I meet again. Frey wishes to make clear something that he'd said to me in Rotterdam about not giving a damn about record sales in England, saying he does care about the band's record success over here.

Another request for an interview is turned down since Frey has to leave the country early to go and visit his folks in Detroit where the Eagles are playing their next gig.

Henley, however, asks me to call him up at his hotel, The Inn On The Park (he's staying at a different hotel to the rest of the band) on Sunday, which I subsequently do only to find that he's not in. I do, however, contact Henley on Monday morning and after exchanging a few words with the drummer, Azoff is put on the phone. He proceeds to call me to order for contacting an artist without going through the necessary channels and says that if I'm as unfair to Joe Walsh (an interview has been arranged between myself and Walsh on Monday afternoon) as I have been to the Eagles, I'll never get near one of his artists again.

A couple of hours later Walsh calls the interview off, fearing a hatchet job. I'm just tired of the whole thing, I know they're sensitive people but this is pushing it a bit.

STEVE CLARKE

"We're not here to make money. We're here to sell records"
IRVING AZOFF

RELEASED: FEBRUARY 17, 1976

THEIR GREATEST HITS (1971-1975)

Apparently against their wishes, the Eagles release the best-selling compilation of all time, precision built for the freeway and paving the drive to *Hotel California*. BY PETER WATTS

THEIR Greatest Hits is a goliath: simply one of the biggest selling records of all time. Let's start with some numbers. This was the first album to ever reach platinum status for one million sales, a yardstick that was introduced in 1976, which was when *Their Greatest Hits* hit the racks. But unlike other compilations, this one continued to grow, exerting a hold on the charts and US pop culture that remains staggering. When the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) announced America's best-selling records of all time in 1999, *Their Greatest Hits* was at No 1, with more than 27 million sales, putting it significantly ahead of *Thriller*, which was commonly believed to be the chart-topper. That made it America's biggest-selling record of the 20th century.

When the RIAA revised the numbers in 2009, *Thriller* had regained the lead but after the RIAA updated their charts again in 2018, *Their Greatest Hits* was once again the best-selling record in the US of all time, now with a certified 38 million sales – that's 38 times platinum. Current estimates have it with international sales of around 45 million sales, which puts it fifth in the worldwide all-time list and the undisputed best-selling compilation in the world. It's notable that the bulk of those sales come from the US, where *Their Greatest Hits* has spent more than 250 weeks in the *Billboard* Top 100. And assuming the RIAA figures are accurate, *Their Greatest Hits* has sold something like 90 per cent of its entire worldwide total in the US, whereas *Thriller* is closer to 50/50 (and remains the best-selling record in the world). That suggests that the Eagles are the quintessential American act, but one that strangely, given the ubiquity of American pop culture, hasn't travelled hugely outside of that home market. Everybody around the world has heard of the Eagles of course – they aren't the US version of Slade – but it's notable how much bigger they are at home than abroad.

It's worth noting that *Hotel California*, released later in 1976, isn't too far behind *Their Greatest Hits* in the all-time bestseller charts. The Eagles are the only artists to have two LPs in the Top 10 – something that beggars belief when you consider the calibre of competition. The Beatles and the Stones don't even make the Top 10 once.

How to account for *Their Greatest Hits*' huge success? Timing certainly helped. It came out with the Eagles on a roll, having released four successive top five singles, including two No 1s in a row – "Best Of My Love" and "One Of These Nights". Both those tracks appeared on *Their Greatest Hits*, along with three others that had gone top 10 – "Witchy Woman", "Lyin' Eyes" (a No 2) and "Take It To The Limit" (a No 4). *One Of Those Nights* had been a success too, becoming the Eagles first No 1 album.

The coup de grâce was the addition of one non-single album track, "Desperado"

That's a decent run, and meant there were enough well-known, recently released songs on *Their Greatest Hits* to appeal to the casual fan. These five were complemented by three more Top 40 singles – "Take It Easy" at No 12, "Peaceful Easy Feeling" at No 22 and "Already Gone" at No 32. The only single on the album that didn't reach the Top 40 is "Tequila Sunrise", which stalled at No 64 despite being the best song on the record. But the coup de grâce was the addition of one non-single album track, the unavoidable "Desperado", which was popular partly because of Linda Ronstadt's 1973 cover. There was no room for excellent album tracks like "On The Border", "Hollywood Waltz", "After The Thrill Is Gone" or two of the band's other flop singles ▶

EAGLES
THEIR GREATEST HITS

'TAKE IT EASY'
WITCHY WOMAN'
LYIN' EYES
ALREADY GONE
DESPERADO'
ONE OF THESE NIGHTS
TEQUILA SUNRISE'
TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT
PEACEFUL EASY FEELING'
BEST OF MY LOVE'

ASYLUM RECORDS
Made In UK
33⅓ RPM
SIDE 1
K 53017
(7E-1052)
℗ 1976
K 53017 A
STEREO
THEIR GREATEST HITS 1971-1975
1. TAKE IT EASY (Browne/Frey) 3.29
2. WITCHY WOMAN (Henley/Leadon) 4.10
♡3. LYIN' EYES (Henley/Frey) 6.21
☆4. ALREADY GONE (Tempchin/Strandlund) 4.13
5. DESPERADO (Henley/Frey) 3.33
THE EAGLES
Produced by Glyn Johns for Intergloval Records
☆Produced by Bill Szymczyk for
Pandora Productions Ltd.
WARNER BROS. MUSIC (1—5)
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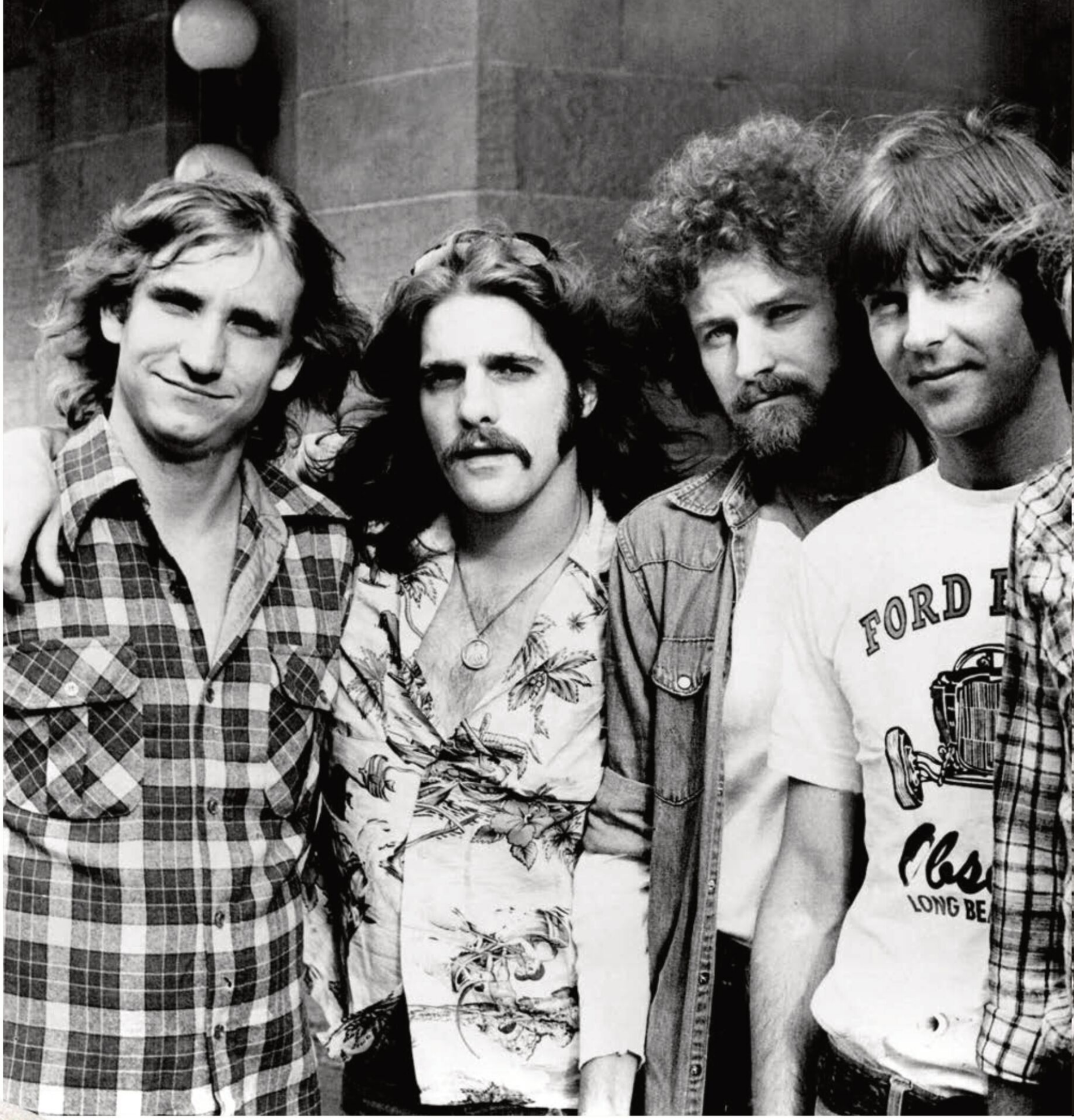


CRITICS' VERDICTS

"Laidback American rock par excellence; most of these tracks should need no introduction to British rock fans. Immaculate harmonies, fine instrumentals and strong melodies give classics like 'Take It Easy', 'One Of These Nights' and the much covered 'Desperado' the touch of class that's kept the Eagles at the top in the States for five years."
MELODY MAKER, MARCH 20, 1976

"Like Elton John, the Carpenters and latter-day McCartney, the best of their music (and their standards are usually high) is high-class pop and nothing more or less. And like those artists, when their quality starts to slip they're merely an MOR band."
STEVE CLARKE, NME, MARCH 20, 1976

– the retro "James Dean" and the Crazy Horse-esque "Outlaw Man".

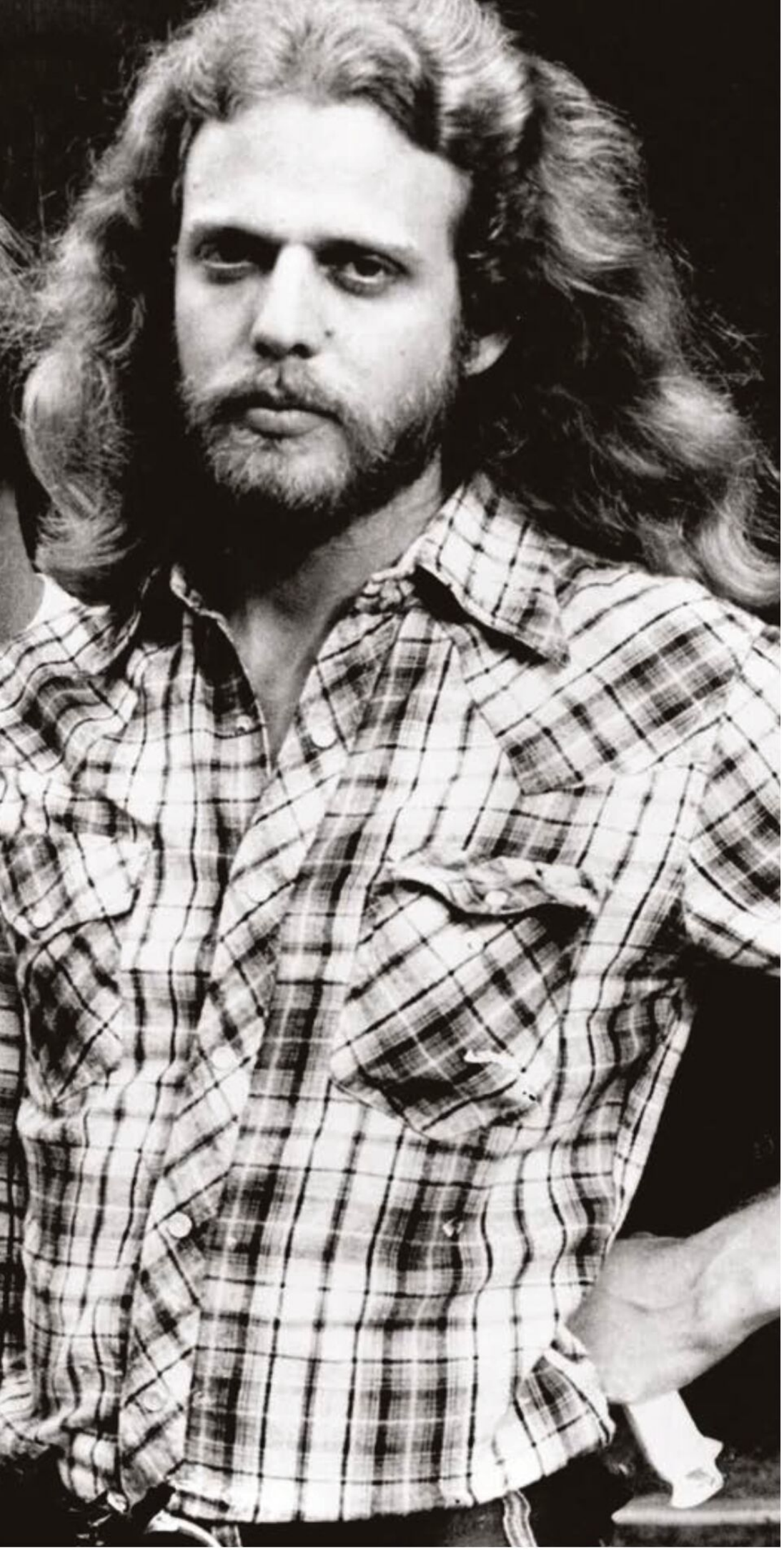
That's a good call because although "Outlaw Man" is a really excellent song it has an abrasiveness that doesn't fit the vibe of *Their Greatest Hits*. Not only is this one of the smoothest and most easy-going records you are ever likely to hear, it's also one with an almost seamless flow from start to close, even though it draws on material from four different albums, written and recorded over a number of years in different studios with different producers, and reassembled in defiantly non-chronological status. There's ballads, rockers, R&B, country rock and even a waltz, but it all hangs together as if it was made to be that way.

Quite who was responsible for getting this right isn't entirely clear as the band were never consulted and opposed the release of *Their Greatest Hits*. "All the label was worried about were their quarterly reports," Don Henley once complained. "They didn't give a shit whether the greatest hits album was good or not, they just wanted product."

Perhaps the band feared that a comp would act as a headstone to their career, suggesting their time was coming to a close just as they were starting to build momentum. The comp, after all, is often seen as an epitaph, to be released when a band has fragmented, retired or faded into insignificance. Alternatively, it could be a stopgap, keeping the flame alive in an extended unproductive or uncommercial period. Neither of these factors held true in the case of *Their Greatest Hits*, which came out around seven months after *One Of These Nights*. Nor was the record the result of a need to fulfil an unwanted contract or due to a change in labels. So why was it made? Manager Irving Azoff has the simplest explanation. "We decided it was time to put out the first greatest hits because we had enough hits," he said.

PERHAPS inadvertently, *Their Greatest Hits* acts as a brilliant recap of the first act of the band's career. Every track was written and recorded by the original incarnation of the group – Randy Meisner, Henley, Glenn Frey and Bernie Leadon, as well as Don Felder, who joined for *On The Border*. Shortly before *Their Greatest Hits* was released, Leadon was replaced by Joe Walsh, signally the start of their second act. That gives the album consistency, emphasising those elements – Frey's soft guitar tone, Leadon's versatility, Henley's enigmatic fills, the wonderful harmonies, the terrific sound and overall tempo – that unite the band despite the subtle variations of each album.

The pitfall of many compilations is having to account for huge changes in sound and band development. Sometimes this leads to a wonderfully diverse selection of tunes that act as a testament to a band's creativity, but more often a compilation will struggle to adequately accommodate shifts in



Fully comped: the Eagles in January 1976

tone and tempo, particularly when recorded in different studios with different equipment and personnel. And the opposite is also true – too many songs that sound the same can detract from a band's appeal to all but the biggest fans. The ideal compilation is one with the harmony of a studio album but containing only good moments, without any annoying experiments or recorded-in-haste filler – which is exactly what you get with *Their Greatest Hits*.

Another reason *Their Greatest Hits* doesn't get boring is the vocals. With Frey taking lead on five songs ("Take It Easy", "Tequila Sunrise", "Lyin' Eyes", "Already Gone", "Peaceful Easy Feeling"), Henley on lead for four ("One Of These Days", "Witchy Woman", "Desperado", "Best Of My Love") and plucky Meisner stepping up for "Take It To The Limit" there's sufficient variation at the top end to keep things interesting.

The band's performances across the four studio albums leading up to *Their Greatest Hits* are consistent enough for the tracks to be put together in non-chronological order, but "Take It Easy" is the ideal opener having been the band's first single as well as the opening track on their debut. Few debut songs introduce a band's vibe quite as effectively. Similarly, "Desperado" showcases their gift for storytelling, making it a great way to end the first side, which democratically features songs from each studio album across its five tracks.

The second side is just as strong, containing the band's two No 1s, the sweet waltz "Take It To The Limit" and the beautiful "Tequila Sunrise", which is probably the least typical song on the album but one that captures their sense of forlorn, melancholic beauty in slightly more ragged form than usual. "Tequila Sunrise" aside, what you really get on *Their Greatest Hits* is a cascade of un-skippable hits that suit almost any occasion – this is great driving music, it can play in the background, you can sing along to it in the kitchen or listen to it on hold to the dentist. Which is presumably why at least 40 million people own a copy.

> **"The *Greatest Hits* kicked our momentum into a high gear"**
> **DON HENLEY**

Such phenomenal success inevitably sparked a clash of the titans. Over at Sony, owners of the Jackson catalogue, questions have been asked about the veracity of the Eagles' book-keeping. Their point is that between 2006 and 2018, *Their Greatest Hits* acquired an additional nine million sales according to RIAA. But Sony had their own, rather different data, supplied by Nielsen Music, which showed the record had only gained the equivalent of 2.3 million sales in that period. Warner, who own the Eagles' catalogue, explained that they had gone deep into their archives to undertake a "forensic" search of all sales and royalty reports going right back to the original release of *Their Greatest Hits* and this had been certified by the RIAA. They'd done something similar before admittedly, but this time they did it better.

There are other factors too: Nielsen was only founded in 1991, so doesn't have as deep history as the RIAA, while the RIAA counts shipments rather than sales. Similarly, Nielsen doesn't have the capacity to check albums sold at concerts, through artist/label websites or via TV marketing and record clubs. All the same, the Sony suits were fuming. "The notion that they can go back 10, 15, 20 or 30 years and find units that were never counted before is absurd," said a piqued Sony executive. "They reviewed these records before. Why didn't they find those uncounted records then?"

What all this shows is how hard it is to track accurate sales figures but also how important having that number one-selling record remains to the major labels as Warner clearly expended considerable cost and energy to find every last copy sold.

Even Don Henley has come round to it. By 2016, Henley could put the album into a wider context – one that took into consideration the huge success of its direct beneficiary, *Hotel California*. He acknowledged that *Their Greatest Hits* could have been a headstone but instead it was a springboard that continues to reap reward. "There was the enormous and somewhat unexpected success of the *Their Greatest Hits* album," he told *Rolling Stone*. "We didn't really want that album to be released, but had allowed the label to do it in order to buy ourselves more time to work on the *Hotel California* album. So, when the *Greatest Hits* album literally exploded on the charts that really kicked the momentum into high gear. By the time *Hotel California* was released in December 1976, the circumstances couldn't have been better; the world was ready and waiting."

SLEEVE NOTES THEIR GREATEST HITS [1971-1975]

1 Take It Easy ★★★★★
2 Witchy Woman ★★★★★
3 Lyin' Eyes ★★★★
4 Already Gone ★★★★
5 Desperado ★★★★★
6 One Of These Nights ★★★★★
7 Tequila Sunrise ★★★★★
8 Take It To The Limit ★★★★
9 Peaceful Easy Feeling ★★★★
10 Best Of My Love ★★★★

LABEL: Asylum
PRODUCED BY: Glyn Johns, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Olympic, London; Island, London; Record Plant, LA; Criteria, Miami.
PERSONNEL: Glenn Frey (guitars, vocals, piano), Bernie Leadon (guitars, backing vocals, banjo, pedal steel, mandolin), Randy Meisner (bass, guitar, vocals), Don Henley (drums, vocals), Don Felder (guitar)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 1

TREVOR JAMES ROBERT DALLEN/FAIRFAX MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: DECEMBER 8, 1976

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

From the Eagles' turpitude comes a dream-like take on the American Nightmare. It's part of the dark underbelly of a corrupted country, even as it maps the territory. BY NIGEL WILLIAMSON

BY the time the Eagles came to make *Hotel California*, they were as fucked up as only serious cash and absolute power knows how to make you. They had taken it to the limit and the result was a decadent malaise which couldn't be soothed by sex, drugs or money.

There was so much cocaine around the band that the joke among their crew was that you got to sleep four hours a week – whether you wanted to or not. Frey and Henley, as the latter inelegantly put it, were "dudes on the rampage", working their way through a conveyor belt of Hollywood starlets and teenage beauties.

Life was lived in the fast line and the parties were as outrageous as the song said. The band's slogan – coined by newcomer Joe Walsh, the "wild" Leadon replacement who took to carving it into the furniture wherever he went – was "party til ya puke".

But the drink and the drugs, the egos and the arrogance had also turned the party into an emotional war zone. Henley and Frey – for so long partners in crime, competitors and housemates in the Hollywood hills – had fallen out in an incendiary alpha male row and Henley had moved out.

Henley was also at war with Walsh, Frey was barely on speaking terms with Don Felder and Randy Meisner was pissed off with both Frey and Henley for relegating him to the band's creative backburner. "Success changed everything," Meisner later lamented to Marc Eliot, author of the 1998 biography *To The Limit: The Untold Story Of The Eagles*. "The friendships were kind of gone at that point."

They were flying at the peak of their success but it felt like the highest of highs was giving way to the lowest of lows. It was out of this overheated and toxic maelstrom that the Eagles – and in particular Henley, who had a writing credit on all but two of the tracks – fashioned their masterpiece. They did so by chronicling the symptoms and causes of the disease and weaving the diagnosis into the metaphorical and multi-layered song cycle that became *Hotel California*.

> **"Success changed everything. Friendships were gone"**
> **RANDY MEISNER**

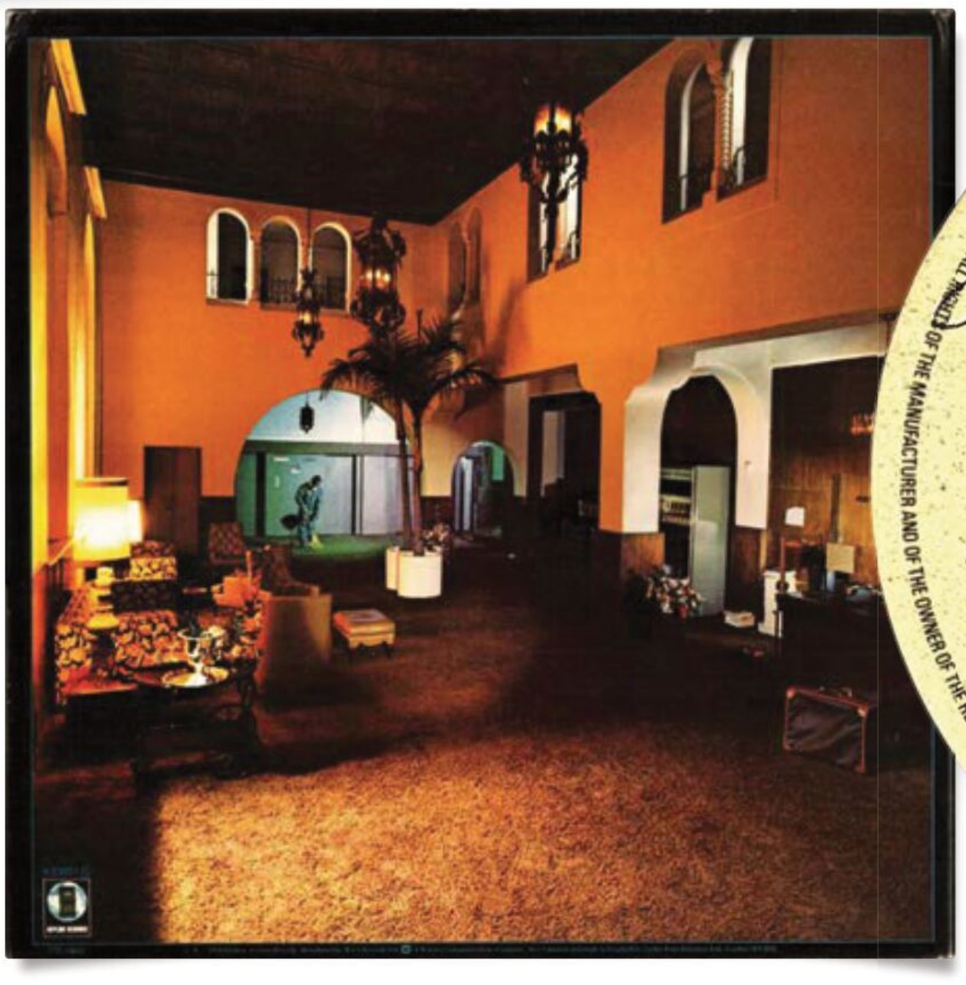
On one level the songs constituted an autobiographical, fire-and-brimstone commentary on the Eagles' own journey to the edge of a moral abyss. But the themes of *Hotel California* were at the same time far more universal. The album was, in effect, nothing less than a requiem for the baby boomer generation and a dream that had soured.

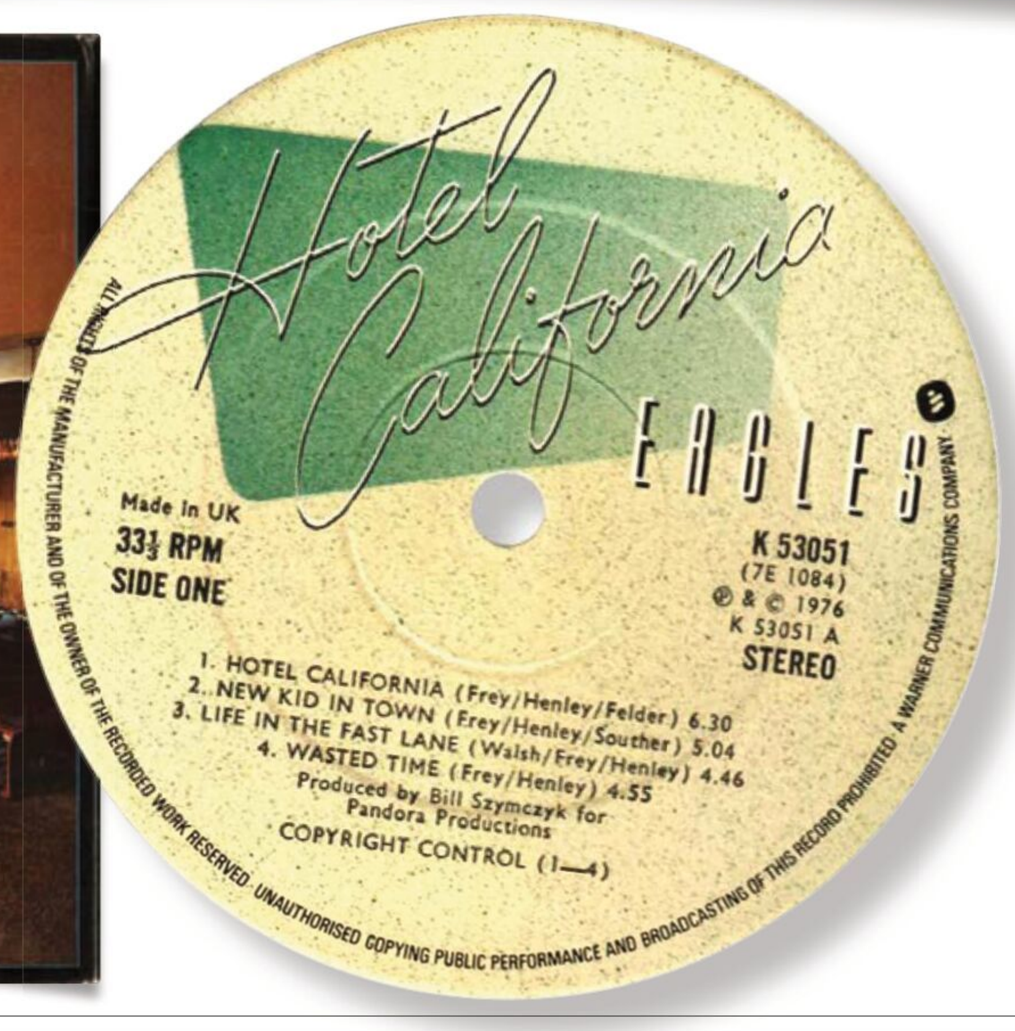
By the time they came to record *Hotel California*, the first boomers had turned 30. Carefree songs about running down the road in pursuit of a boundless freedom no longer cut it with a generation facing up to parenthood and mortgages. Lassitude and disillusionment were everywhere as, in its bicentennial year, America found itself in a post-Watergate world of fractured hopes and corrupted ideals, spiritual dissipation and moral ambivalence.

The shadows of twilight were crowding in and Henley, who as well as being one of rock'n'roll's supreme hedonists was also one of its greatest moralisers – felt it more keenly than anyone. "It's a fine line between the American dream and the American nightmare," he said in the 2013 documentary *History Of The Eagles*.

If *Hotel California* had been given an alternative title, it could easily have been called 'How The West Was Lost'. "People think the album was about California but it was ▶

Hotel California




Hotel California
EAGLES
Made In UK
33⅓ RPM
SIDE ONE
K 53051
(7E 1084)
℗ & © 1976
K 53051 A
STEREO
1. HOTEL CALIFORNIA (Frey/Henley/Felder) 6.30
2. NEW KID IN TOWN (Frey/Henley/Souther) 5.04
3. LIFE IN THE FAST LANE (Walsh/Frey/Henley) 4.46
4. WASTED TIME (Frey/Henley) 4.55
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Pandora Productions
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about the dark underbelly of American culture at large," Henley said. "It's about loss of innocence, fading glory and decadence."

The cultural commentator Ross Douthat – who wasn't even born when *Hotel California* was released – received much acclaim in academic circles for his intellectual deconstruction of the stagnant state of western liberalism in *The Decadent Society: How We Became The Victims Of Our Own Success*, published in 2020. What none of the reviewers who praised the book pointed out was that Henley and the Eagles had nailed the same argument rather more tunefully, over 40 years earlier.

Even the circumstances of *Hotel California*'s recording seemed rooted in the fears and paranoia of the times. The band wanted to record on home turf in Los Angeles but producer Bill Szymczyk refused. His objection was not to LA's moral fault-lines but to its geological ones. He was convinced an earthquake was about to lay the City Of Angels to waste, quite possibly followed by famine and pestilence and the stars falling from the sky. He told the Eagles he was never going to work in LA again and that his position was non-negotiable – so in March 1976 they flew to Florida to begin recording at Miami's Criteria Studios.

Szymczyk subsequently revealed there was a second reason for the relocation. He was, he admitted, desperate to get them out of LA and "away from all of the partying and the hangers-on".

If so, the ruse didn't entirely work. Black Sabbath were also in residence at Criteria, recording their *Technical Ecstasy* album, and bassist Geezer Butler recalled having to scrape mountains of white powder out of the mixing desk after the Eagles had been at work. "They'd left about a pound of cocaine in the board," he recalled.

It wasn't the only problem. "The Eagles were recording next door, but we were too loud for them," Tony Iommi proudly told *Uncut* in 2014. "It kept coming through the wall into their sessions."

As a result at least one track, "The Last Resort", had to be re-recorded multiple times due to the noise leakage and, in the end, the Miami sessions were augmented with overdubs at the Record Plant back in LA. In total the recording took seven months and the album was released in December 1976, two weeks before Christmas.

IT opened with the title track and the chiming twin guitar intro of Walsh and Felder, who had written the abstract, arpeggiated sequence on an acoustic 12-string in a beach house in Malibu, demoed it and presented it to the band. "Basically all the parts were there. I put a melody on top of it while driving around," revealed Henley, who claimed he wrote most of his songs in his car as it was the only place he could get some privacy.

Until the song had a lyric, its working title was "Mexican Reggae", the description Frey had given the tune on first hearing. But it was Henley's words that set the tone. In part the lyrics were inspired by his recent break-up with Loree Rodkin, an interior designer to the Hollywood stars, and it was her mind which was "*Tiffany twisted*" as she entertained "*the pretty boys that she calls friends*".

But from there Henley constructed a dark meditation on the moral complexities of privilege, excess and self-destruction as the lyric described a journey from the "*shimmering light*" seen ahead to incarceration as prisoners who "*just can't kill the beast*".

> **"The parts were there. I put a melody on top of it while driving"**
> **DON HENLEY**

Henley rated "Hotel California" as his finest ever lyric, although he credited Frey with adding several lines. Musically it was glossed and polished to perfection, spliced together from numerous takes. Szymczyk reported that there were no fewer than 33 edits in the song's six and a half minutes and the coda featuring the duelling guitars of Walsh and Felder took the pair three days to achieve, Henley forbidding them to jam and demanding that every note was planned with an exacting precision.

Perhaps the recording was just too immaculate. Played ubiquitously in bars and coffee shops, at wedding parties and bar mitzvahs over the years, it's the song's sonic perfection rather the depth of its message which finds favour – much to Henley's irritation. Complaining that critics didn't treat the Eagles' lyrics with the same respect afforded to Jackson Browne and Bruce Springsteen, he told *Crawdaddy*: "They don't seem to think we can write a catchy tune that's a hit that also means something."

Many believe that Springsteen was the subject of the album's second track, "New Kid In Town". JD Souther, who contributed the song's chorus, denied that was his intention but Henley, who at the time was obsessed with trying to top the success of *Born To Run*, lent the theory some credence. The song was not only about the fickleness of romance but also about the fleeting nature of fame, he admitted in the liner notes to *The Very Best Of The Eagles*. "We were basically saying, 'Look, we know we're red hot right now but we also know that somebody's going to come along and replace us.'" Either way, it's a sublime slice of bittersweet canyon-rock and Frey's angst-ridden "*I don't want to hear it*" is nothing short of exquisite.

"Life in the Fast Lane" was inspired by a ride Frey took with his bagman. "I was riding shotgun in a Corvette with a drug dealer on the way to a poker game," he recalled in the 2013 documentary *The History Of The Eagles*. "The next thing I know we're doing 90. I say, 'Hey, man!' He grins and goes, 'Life in the fast lane!' I thought, 'Now there's a song title'."

Walsh came up with the riff during a band rehearsal and Henley augmented the lyrics with his vision of LA as a modern-day Babylon. He claimed the song was a cautionary tale that cocaine messes you up, but many took lines such as "*everything, all the time*" as a hymn to hedonism. And in a way it was surely both. The Eagles were world beaters in debauchery and although they knew the dangers, they were also its prisoners. That disjunction, of course, was key to the entire album.

Side one ended with "Wasted Time", a break-up ballad inspired by Rodkin, the theme of which was also reprised at the start of side two. Marc Eliot felt that Henley used his love life "to load up on some emotional high-octane" in order to fuel his one true passion, which was his music. With piano, organ, strings and vaulting harmonies, Frey saw the arrangement as an homage to the sweet sound of Philly soul and likened Henley to "our Teddy Pendergrass".

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"It's allegory-time, by the way, as LA becomes a giant opulent but decadent hotel full of similarly transient folk chasing the dream and watching others ensconced in the perverse role-playing that entails grasping hold of the latter... The record impresses me somehow. There's no laurels-resting, and a lot of thought and work has gone into its meticulous crafting. Nevertheless, there's something slightly overbearing and sanctimonious in the idea of a king-pin LA band debunking the California Myth while they're bound to hone in the bucks by the barrel full for the effort."
NICK KENT, NME, DECEMBER 18, 1976

"This will sell by the ton, you can be sure of that. It's got the smooth refinement you always associate with the Eagles and makes it unequivocally Broad Appeal material; yet there's also a bit more aggression and raunchiness this time, so as not to alienate the hard rock fraternity too much. Sunny California with a few unexploded bombs littered around the place."
COLIN IRWIN, MELODY MAKER, DECEMBER 11, 1976

Lyrically "Victim Of Love" was cut from similar cloth: "*I see a broken heart/ You got your stories to tell*" and where better to tell them than in an Eagles song? Yet musically it could not have been more different. Recorded with the band playing live in the studio with only Henley's lead vocal and the chorus harmonies over-dubbed, this was as down-and-dirty as such a bunch of perfectionists were ever going to get. Szymczyk even had "V.O.L. is a five piece live" etched on the album's run-out groove as a subliminal message to critics who accused the Eagles of being too clean and clinical.

The newly arrived Walsh slotted easily into Henley's schema and the album's themes with the lovely, waltz-like "Pretty Maids All In A Row". Written with Joe Vitale from his former band, the mood on Bob Dylan's favourite Eagles song is full of a mournful nostalgia for lost innocence as "the storybook comes to a close" and he wonders "why must we grow up so fast?" If Walsh's solo voice is an acquired taste, here it's genuinely affecting.

Meisner gets his moment writing and singing "Try And Love Again", the album's often overlooked gem and a gorgeously melodic slice of country rock that could have graced the Eagles' debut album. But it proved to be his swansong. During the tour that followed, he got into a fist fight with Frey and was gone.

Lyin' eyes: all smiles amid the tension in 1977, not long before the departure of Randy Meisner (far right)

If Henley thought the opening title track contained his finest lyrics, Frey was one of many who felt that he topped it on the album closer, "The Last Resort". At seven and a half minutes it's the album's longest track and an epic in every sense, a state-of-the-union address which other band members dubbed "The Vast Report".

Over a piano-led accompaniment that starts out plaintively and swells to a string-drenched crescendo, Henley draws together *Hotel California*'s myriad themes into a symbolic retelling of the great American myth. From the "*old world shadows*" through the manifest destiny of the expansion westwards, we eventually reach the ocean where there is "*no more new frontier*" and our "*endless needs and bloody deeds*" mean we kiss paradise goodbye and face the oncoming apocalypse. As a gothic vision of America's original sin, it's Henley's equivalent of Dylan's "Desolation Row" or even John Dos Passos's USA trilogy.

On the back of the monumental success of *Their Greatest Hits*, *Hotel California* was primed for big things, and few came bigger. With between an estimated 32 and 41 million sales, it regularly ranks among the greatest records ever made. The title track would come to define, more than any other song, the America of the late-'70s. How do you follow that? The answer was you couldn't – as the Eagles were about to find out.

SLEEVE NOTES HOTEL CALIFORNIA

1 Hotel California ★★★★★
2 New Kid In Town ★★★★
3 Life In The Fast Lane ★★★★★
4 Wasted Time ★★★★★
5 Wasted Time (reprise – instrumental) ★★★
6 Victim Of Love ★★★
7 Pretty Maids All In A Row ★★★★
8 Try And Love Again ★★★★
9 The Last Resort ★★★★★

LABEL: Asylum
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Criteria, Miami; Record Plant, Los Angeles
PERSONNEL: Don Henley (drums, vocals, synthesiser), Glenn Frey (guitars, vocals, keyboards), Don Felder (guitars, vocals, pedal steel), Randy Meisner (bass, vocals, guitarrón), Joe Walsh (guitars, keyboards, vocals)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 1

ELLENPOPPINGA - K&K/REDFERNS

"IT'S ABOUT THE THE '60s AND DECADENCE

California boys: (l-r) Don Felder, Don Henley, Joe Walsh, Glenn Frey and Randy Meisner in 1976

DEMISE OF IN THE '70s"

As mellow as they appear to be, the EAGLES have a new album which explores a more satirical side. "We have a love-hate relationship with California," says GLENN FREY. "Like anything you love, you're capable of hating it, too."

RB/REDFERNS

MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 11, 1976

WHAT'S it like, I asked, being an Eagle? Glenn Frey, a perpetual talker, paused to consider the question and the silence lasted almost a minute.

"Oh well... it's not unlike anything I've done all my life. It's not unlike being in any other band, but the world around me seems to change its perspective on me as much as I change my perspective on it. So what it is really... it's a pain in the ass."

Frey and Don Henley collapsed into laughter.

"What he means by that," said Henley, attempting to introduce an element of seriousness into an interview that had already lasted well over an hour, "is that especially over the past year we have felt a tremendous amount of pressure. It's almost harder once you get to the top of the mountain than it is climbing it. It's hard to stay up there and maintain it.

"I admire the Stones, no matter what I think about their music, because they've stuck there. I admire Paul Simon and The Who simply because they've stuck around and not burned themselves out. It's hard because you lose a lot of friends along the way."

"Being an Eagle can be a handicap," said Frey, "but only because of what other people tend to think. Your life is not your own any more, but that's a concession I'm willing to make."

"But we asked for it," added Henley.

"It's almost harder once you get to the top of the mountain than it is climbing it"
DON HENLEY

THE Beverly Hills Hotel sits elegantly at the junction of Sunset Boulevard and Beverly Drive, its pink rococo walls almost camouflaged by the pale green palm trees that have been planted in endless rows along the grassy sidewalks of this most sumptuous Los Angelean suburb.

Stories concerning the hotel are legendary, principally because it has, over the years, housed rich and famous guests whose behaviour has made Hollywood synonymous with decadence. Nonetheless it is a discreet establishment: if the bellhops know anything they keep their lips sealed and conversations in the Polo Room Bar are deflected by the walls that surround the choice booths.

The hotel itself is probably not the one directly referred to by the Eagles in the title track of their new album *Hotel California*, though the ambience of the establishment is neatly reflected in the song's lyrics. Either way it was the location chosen by Glenn Frey and Don Henley for one of their rare interviews last week.

Frey and Henley, the two main vocalists in the group, are the perennial spokesmen for the band, whose music has consistently reflected the sound of California in the '70s as much as the Beach Boys represented the Golden State in the '60s.

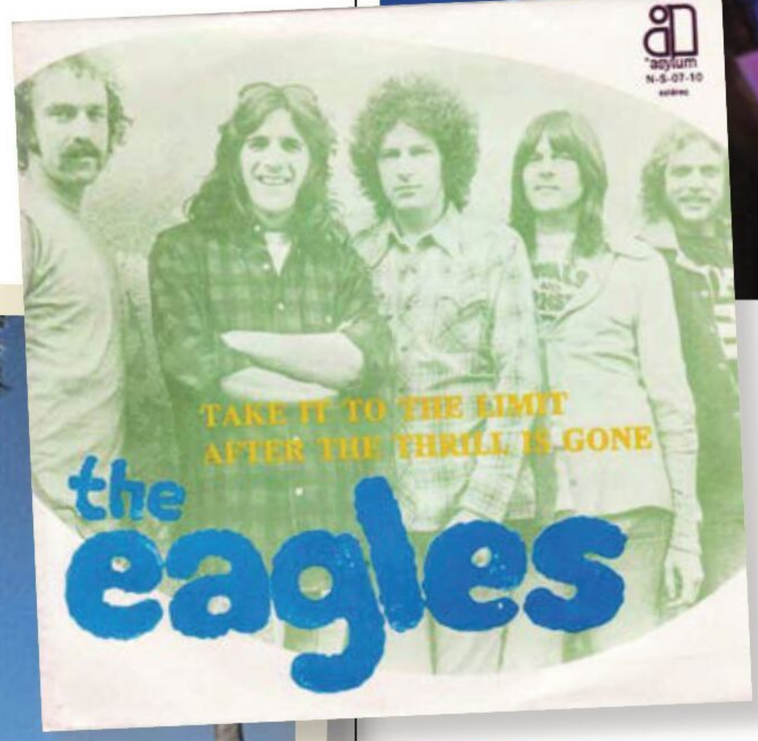
The other longest serving member of the band, Nebraskan bass player Randy Meisner, whose soaring falsetto graces such tracks as "Take It To The Limit" is a shy, retiring man who rushes home to his wife and three children whenever the group have a free moment.

Which isn't very often these days. Throughout 1976 the Eagles have toured the US almost constantly, finally consolidating their position as one of the top few (regularly working) bands in the country.

Their year began on a shaky note with Bernie Leadon's departure and the simultaneous arrival of Joe Walsh, a partnership that seemed, on paper, to be a curious mixture of rock and harmony. It's worked, though, and the Eagles are now bigger than ever.

Their Greatest Hits has notched up sales in the region of five million copies and, at the same time, introduced the band to a whole new audience. Joe Walsh, who doubtless had a following of his own, has probably done the same thing.

Work on *Hotel California* began in March and



Check out any time you like...: The Beverly Hills Hotel

SLIM AARONS/GETTY IMAGES

"Those boys really get on": Meisner, Frey and Felder on stage in 1976

ended in October. The sessions were crammed into spare days when the band wasn't playing live and, like all their albums, it reflects the cautious approach that the band have towards their records.

It seems, at times, as if all the individual words and notes, all the intricate little harmonies and all the little background guitar chops, are carefully considered before insertion. Sometimes the results are almost too good to be true, but usually they produce the best floating harmonies, effortlessly easygoing music, since the Everly Brothers.

The new album is based loosely around a concept in that the State of California represents a hotel whose guests have somehow reached the end of the day; somewhat vaguely it's supposed to chronicle the decaying morals of the '70s. Frey and Henley don't enjoy explaining the meaning, which is far less obvious than the western concept of *Desperado*, their second album.

Musically it features more extremes: the lusher cuts are as mellow as the Eagles have ever been, even to the point where one track is reprised as an instrumental with only a string section playing, while the uptempo material bounces along with a harshness that must have come from Joe Walsh. Surprisingly, Walsh's only composer credit is a slow song he wrote some time ago with Joe Vitale, onetime drummer in Walsh's defunct Barnstorm band.

"A lot of the music on this album came very easy to us," said Frey, sipping coffee in a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel last week. "We worked up three of the songs for the October tour that we played and found them easy to do on stage.

"WE have been playing the title track, 'Wasted Time' and 'New Kid In Town', but it's difficult to do new tunes on stage. If the people haven't heard them on the radio then they just don't pay that much attention. There has to be a repetition factor for some reason.

"When we start touring again in March the album will have been out two months or so and by that time we'll be playing it all or most of it."

Although it's been almost a year and a half since the group's last studio album, *One Of These Nights*, they didn't have the usual wealth of spare material that most bands accumulate. "We hardly ever do," said Henley. "We can usually tell when we start a song that if we get past an eighth of the way into finishing it, it'll be worth doing. If we don't get that far then we know it won't be worth finishing.

"The ones that get finished wind up on the record. I know some people write a lot of tunes, pick the best and throw the rest away but with us they never reach that far. We do save ideas though, especially ballads. We also try to balance an album because we believe it's a work of art and it should have contrast and continuity at the same time."

"The rock'n'roll on this album came from Felder," said Frey, who always refers to the band's second guitarist by his surname as if to differentiate between him and Henley. "Strangely enough, Joe wrote a ballad, but me and Joe and Don here collaborated on one track together. I think Joe was saving his song because he knew something like his joining the Eagles was coming up."

The circumstances surrounding Walsh's entry into the group seemed to be almost too convenient to be true. Walsh, as a solo artist, ➤

GAI TERRELL/REDFERNS

was and is managed by Irving Azoff, who has run the Eagles since he quit as an employee of the Geffen-Roberts management team who handled the affairs of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young at one time.

When Bernie Leadon quit the group, Walsh was between bands, so his baptism as an Eagle was a natural business move even if some sceptics doubted his musical compatibility.

"We actually knew him some time before he joined," said Frey. "Even while Bernie was still in the band we had a feeling that he might be a part of us before long. We had an indication a year and a half before Bernie left that he was planning to leave – or at least he wasn't going to stay with us for the duration. The duration as we saw it was a much longer period of time than he wanted it to be.

"We had talked to Joe as early as the beginning of 1975 and his attitude was that 'if it ever happens give me a call'. He'd spent a lot of time in his solo ballpark, but he also knew what it was like to be in a band. So we more or less knew which way things were going to go and it was more or less a matter of time. Even as far back as the last time we were in England, which was that Elton John concert, we knew something was going to happen although we didn't want to talk about it."

"We knew for two years that Bernie wasn't happy with the road," said Henley. "He'd been doing it longer than the rest of us. He'd been in the Burrito Brothers, remember, and his road map started five or six years before we began travelling at all.

"Besides, Joe was getting tired of being the leader of a group and feeling that he just wanted to be in a group for a change. He was to be a participant rather than a chief who hired and fired people. Writing all the songs gets to be a big burden on any solo artist."

"There was never any question of trying anybody else," said Frey. "We never made any other calls because there really wasn't anybody else who could join our band, and we wanted to keep it a five-piece group instead of going back down to four again.

"We like the advantages of a five-piece band. When we got Felder it allowed me to just play rhythm guitar and still there were two guitar players, so we could have two leads playing with each other, yet there is still a rhythm instrument playing with the bass and drums."

ACCORDING to Henley, Walsh fitted into the band much easier than doubters suggested. "Most of the media suggested he wouldn't fit because we were a mellower band than anything he'd done before, but I read every review of our last tour and they all said how he didn't clutter or get in the way of our music and how well we played his music.

"On stage we did 'Rocky Mountain Way' and 'Funk #49' and 'Turn To Stone'. He's capable of playing the stuff we do and we're capable of playing his music.

"Sure he introduced some harder guitar playing even though he didn't put it on this album in the way of songwriting, but I think he and Felder played some killer guitar for us all. To me it's like Duane Allman and Eric Clapton together."

Frey agreed. "Those boys [*Felder and Walsh*] really get on well together, which

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

didn't happen with Bernie and Felder."

"Bernie had bluegrass roots," continued Henley. "He'd never really messed with rock'n'-roll guitar and he never really understood how to get that dirty rock'n'roll sound. He was just not schooled or programmed in that area.

"We also knew that Joe was so controlled that he could play the ballads with no problem at all and a lot of people doubted that. Also Felder can play the banjo and a mean mandolin, so we didn't lose anything in that area when Bernie left."

The Eagles' last concert with Leadon was in the fall of 1975 in front of 55,000 fans at Anaheim Stadium in California. Ten days later the remaining four Eagles were rehearsing with Walsh for a tour of Australia and New Zealand and Japan.

"We didn't want any rumours to get around that Bernie had left and that was it for the Eagles," said Frey. "We wanted it out quickly that Bernie had been replaced by Joe and the group were on their way to New Zealand. Even so there were rumours that Joe wasn't staying with us and that the group was going to split up.

"Joe's contract with ABC had expired and Irving Azoff was shopping around the labels to get him another solo deal. First there was talk of Columbia, then staying with ABC and he finally wound up with Asylum, but because he was shopping for a solo deal people construed it as meaning that he couldn't have been interested in recording with the Eagles and that this was a short-term thing. All that was bullshit."

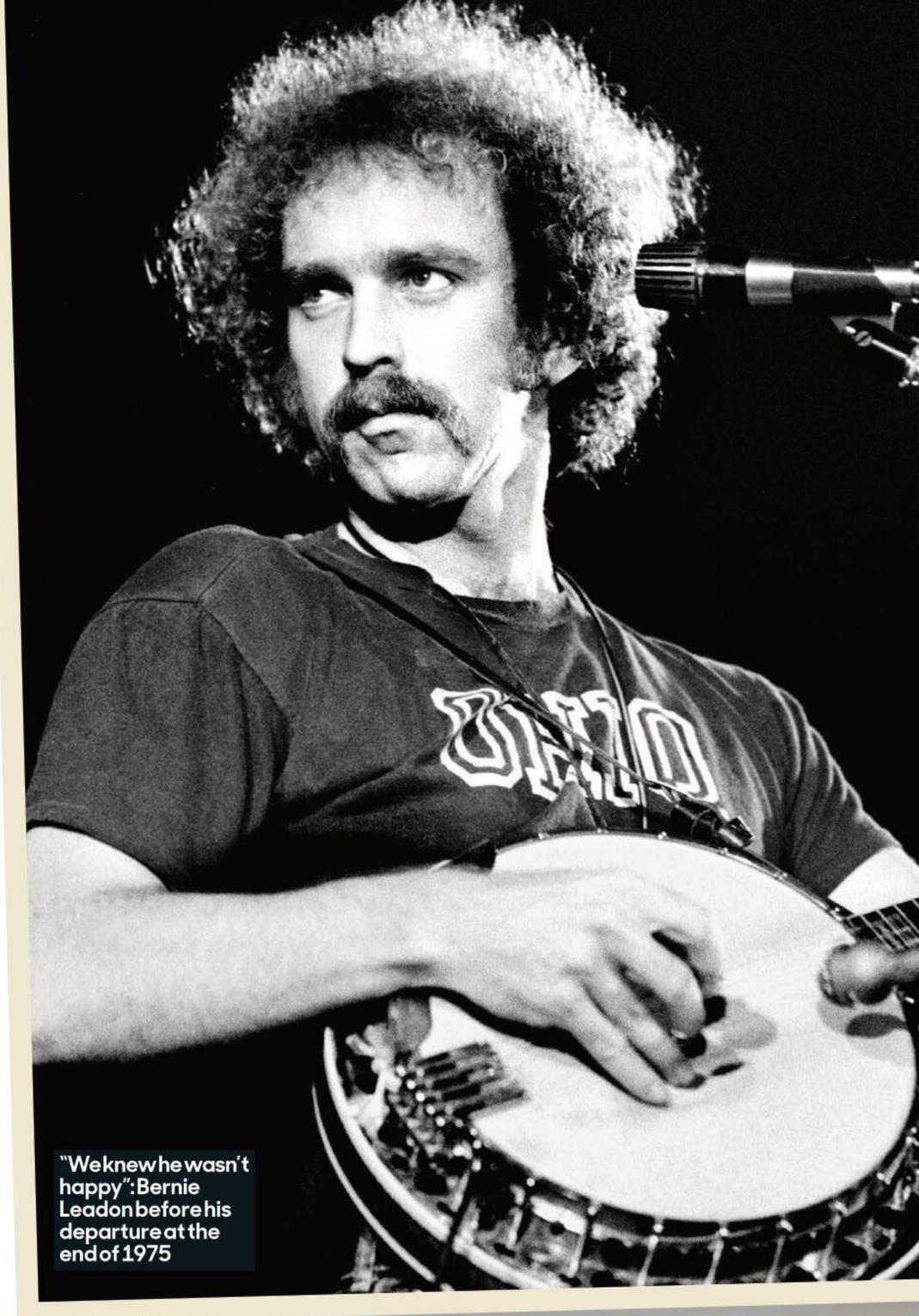
"The band is his first priority," said Henley. "I don't think he cares if he ever makes another solo album."

According to Frey, American audiences were quick to accept the new-look Eagles. "I received one letter from someone who wanted the old Eagles," he said. "He wanted those mellow Eagles."

"And that," said Henley, "was before he'd even heard the show with Joe in it. It said something like... 'How can you let Joe Walsh fuck up your harmonies...' but that was before they'd even given us a chance. I don't know whether we ever wrote him back or not but we don't need those kind of people anyway.

"Joe's own songs proved to be showstoppers in the set and that was a great change for me. In fact they saved me because we've been playing 'Witchy Woman' and that stuff since 1972, and to do new songs was like a shot in the arm for us. We can play that kind of material and always have been able to."

"We were kind of reticent to play that music unless we could make it sound great," said Frey. "We didn't want to make a limp-wristed attempt because we didn't have the right kind of guitar players before. We've been working on getting the right guitar lineup for the last three years and now we feel we've got it."



"We knew he wasn't happy": Bernie Leadon before his departure at the end of 1975

The gang's all here: (l-r) Henley, Meisner, Felder, Dan Fogelberg, Jackson Browne, Walsh, Linda Ronstadt and Kenny Edwards at a benefit for California Governor Jerry Brown in Largo, Maryland, May 14, 1976

"The numbers this year are staggering, and I try not to look at them anymore"
GLENN FREY

"WE'RE not about to change direction, though," said Henley. "We'll be keeping the best of the old style and not abandoning country rock or whatever you like to call it. We just want to stretch things out a little bit. On this album we get into R&B a little bit, which was something that we began on *On The Border* and developed further on *One Of These Nights*.

"But on the tour there was a whole load of kids who were yelling for Joe and I think there was probably a whole load of them who'd never heard his material either. It was like new songs for them."

Leadon, meanwhile, has had an easy year, though he does have plans to record a solo album in the New Year. Glyn Johns, who produced the first two Eagles albums, will be producing the record in a studio that Leadon has built in his home.

"We always knew that he wouldn't just retire completely," said Henley. "He just wanted to do things at his own pace while we were caught up in a momentum and had to take it to the limit, if you'll pardon the expression."

Neither Frey nor Henley expected their *Greatest Hits* album to do as well as it did. "I never expected it to do five million," said Frey with genuine disbelief. "The numbers this year are staggering, and I try not to look at them any more. It's a different kind of person that buys 'Greatest Hits' albums... people who buy them for gifts for children and not the kind who buy regular albums. I think you reach more people with them... you reach the over-25s and the under-15s a lot."

Henley seemed vaguely embarrassed by the success of the record. "Let us say that we aren't really advocates of 'Greatest Hits' albums," he said. "They are more or less a ploy by the record company to get free sales. They don't have to spend any money to make them and they get a lot of money back.

"We got a couple of hate letters after the *Greatest Hits* album came out that said we were selling out... they said that us and Steve Miller were the last bands who were holding off selling out this way.

"But we didn't have anything to do with it. The record company put it out and we couldn't stop them. We had a say in picking the tracks, sequencing them and doing the graphics."

"I must say," said Frey, "that an eagle's skull which appeared on the sleeve is not very good karma in terms of the American Indian. By putting this shiny Eagle's skull on the album we felt like we knew where the 'Greatest Hits' thing was at."

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

"That was what we looked like after writing all those songs," quipped Henley. "But another reason why I didn't feel bad about putting a 'Greatest Hits' album out was that it definitely marked the end of a phase for us. It marked the end of five years, and this new album opens up a whole new era for us.

"Ever since 'Best Of My Love' kicked off a whole big thing for us, moving us from the top 90 per cent of bands in America to the top 10 per cent, we've been running and I never had time to stop and think about how well the *Greatest Hits* record did. We just wanted to stay busy."

A pattern, coincidence perhaps, seems to be emerging with the release of *Hotel California*. The Eagles' first album contained three hit singles – "Take It Easy", "Witchy Woman" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling" – and was followed by a concept album, *Desperado*; the *One Of These Nights* album contained three hit singles – the title track, "Lyin' Eyes" and "Take It To The Limit" – and is followed by their second concept approach.

"Like *Desperado*, it didn't necessarily start out to be a concept album but it became one after all," said Henley. "It's a more urbane version of *Desperado* inasmuch as the symbolism isn't set in the past but is here and now."

"WE had all those hit singles off *One Of These Nights* and that gives you more room to breathe and make an album more like the kind of album we really want to make." said Frey. "We took some artistic liberties with the new record which we hadn't taken before, and part of it was because we felt a slight ease of pressure because the last album had done so damn well."

"Hit singles are no crime," said Henley. "Some people view them to be something that can't be good artistically and that's total nonsense as far as I'm concerned. Paul Simon has hit singles, Bob Dylan has hit singles, Neil Young has hit singles, and The Beatles had lots of hit singles.

"The way the record business is structured these days... if you don't have singles you can forget it. You can work for 10 years making eclectic and artistic underground albums and maybe you'll get the recognition you deserve when you're half-dead.

"But even the FM stations here are playing singles just to stay in business. Admittedly there's a lot of fucking rubbish in the singles charts. I won't mention any names though we all know who they are, so I think AM needs a shot in the arm and I am glad that we can contribute something that I consider quality music to the AM airwaves. God knows... it needs something.

"There'll be some singles off the new album, but they'll be long songs. None of the tracks is much under five minutes long, but we're going to release a double-sided single of 'New Kid In Town' and 'Victim Of Love'."

"There's a lot of rubbish in the charts. AM radio needs a shot in the arm and I'm glad we can contribute"
DON HENLEY

A Hammond organ makes its first appearance on an Eagles album in *Hotel California*, and Walsh was also brought in on various synthesisers, a talent which came as a bonus surprise to the rest of the band. Extra keyboard instruments are now accompanying the Eagles on the road.

"We have to beef up the act to stay in there," said Henley. "We don't want to beef it up with flash and meaningless theatrics like funny clothes and flashlights, or smokebombs or any crap like that. The group has to keep growing musically on stage, even though we do have to keep playing old material.

"When Joe arrived, the older songs began sounding different. I think we were tighter and less cluttered on stage. I can still sing 'Witchy Woman' as inspired as the first time I ever sang it because people want to hear it, and that's enough for me. Sure I can get tired of it after I've been out on the road for three weeks, but each night seems to bring out a little more inspiration in any particular song."

"For me this summer it was Joe's stuff that excited me," said Frey. "It was good to know that after three more Eagles songs we were going to do one of Joe's. And, of course, the new stuff is always more interesting. It was good to see if we could pull off 'Hotel California' and 'Wasted Time', to see if we could make them happen and make the audience dig new tunes.

"I guess 'Take It To The Limit' as well. Randy [*Meisner*] gets a standing ovation whenever he hits the high notes, and sometimes the applause goes on for two or three minutes.

"In the last year and a half Randy has really found himself as a vocalist. 'Take It To The Limit' and 'Too Many Hands' were sung with so much brillance on the record that he is a changed singer in the solo vocalist category. In the group he's always been phenomenal," said Frey.

"RANDY has always been the ribbon on our package. He provides all the bottom and the top, but we have to find the right song for his high voice and that usually means it must be in the ballad category. He delivers on such high intensity too... he even sounds a little like Gene Pitney."

"He's kind of a quiet, shy guy with a family, and he's also been doing it longer than we have," said Henley. "He was in a band called The Poor out here in 1968 and then in Poco, and he doesn't care about interviews and so forth. As far as he's concerned he'll just let Glenn and me shoot off our mouths and make fools of ourselves. He does his job and goes home to Nebraska when it's done."

"We've come to learn that we are different people," said Frey. "We learned through the experience of this group that you can't try to change people to the way you want them to be. Randy is a very dedicated musician and when

"Randy's really found himself as a vocalist": Meisner and Frey in full voice in 1976

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

Centre of attention: Joe Walsh with his new bandmates, 1976

he goes home gets to work on new ideas for the next album in a little studio he has built. Felder lives here in Malibu and he stays there in his own studio recording like a madman.

"These things are going on all the time in this group. We have been together almost non-stop for the past 11 months."

"And that's much too much togetherness," said Henley. "When we do get away we like to get away properly. We all have ladies and other friends, and this year we've neglected our relationships with other musicians like Jackson Browne, JD Souther, Linda Ronstadt and other people we would like to hang out with and write songs with a little more. In the next two or three months we'd like to re-open all those doors and think about our next album.

"John David had a great deal to do with *Hotel California*, and had Jackson Browne not been in the studio making *The Pretender*, I'm sure that he would have been involved as well. JD helped us do 'New Kid In Town' and he helped us finish 'Victim Of Love' too."

"Bill Szymczyk [*the band's producer*] was also very instrumental in helping us with the musical side of this album," said Frey. "He's always influenced us in the R&B direction and in the rock'n'roll side. I think that the recording technique that we developed and perfected by the time we got to *One Of These Nights* reached a conceptual peak here."

Although it appears that, as almost always, the band are writing about the State of California, Henley insists that it is just a microcosm for the rest of the country. "It's the Bicentennial Year, and this is our Bicentennial statement," he said.

"It's kind of about the demise of the '60s and the decadence and escapism we are experiencing in the '70s. It's also about the kind of limbo we're experiencing in the music business while we're waiting for the next big surge of inspiration, like The Beatles or whatever.

"It's an attempt to shake people out of the apathy they are going through, and also a comment on the destruction of the air and the planet and the ecology. I think California represents all that because it is the vanguard of America, the farthest place you can go."

"We work so much because it's therapeutic. We have to keep changing our goals"

GLENN FREY

"We've often been criticised by people on the East Coast for marketing the Southern California lifestyle... the beautiful girls, the houses in the hills, the footloose people and all that kind of thing, but I think people have spoken too soon on that. We think that this album represents the whole world, not just California, as something elegant which has been corrupted," said Frey.

"THIS used to be a beautiful place and it still is fairly attractive, but America used to be too before we came over here and fucked it up," said Henley.

"We have a love-hate relationship with California. Like anything you love, you're capable of hating it, too. On this album we're simply holding California up as an example.

"I wouldn't live anywhere else, though. I wouldn't run away, I'd rather stand here and fight. The song 'Hollywood Waltz' was about people who came here and corrupted it then moved on somewhere else, but we're not doing that. This place has given us all we've got as we became successful here and we're proud of it, but people from the East Coast have really nailed us to the wall for something that they think we represent. I think it's really a personal vendetta rather than a criticism of the music."

Current plans are for the Eagles to play two dates in December – shows they had to cancel earlier this year due to recording commitments – then take three months off before a European tour in April. "There needs to be a period of input after all the output," said Henley.

"Then we're going to Europe to play various countries we haven't played before," said Frey. "We've never played in Germany and never played in France, so that needs to be done. We're also planning to play in Scotland. The only time we ever did that before was with Neil Young. The last time we went to London was the only time I could enjoy it properly."

"We work so much as it's therapeutic," he added. "Sometimes it's easier as the underdog. We have to keep changing our goals so much now. What we have to look for, what I'm doing to keep me going, is to try and get better each time. I try to make my singing a little better, and my music. At this point it's either grow or stagnate, and we won't do that."

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: SEPTEMBER 24, 1979

THE LONG RUN

Kinda bent, actually breaking. Foul moods, creative exhaustion, internal conflict and furious "monstering" make for a rancorous first-era swansong. BY JASON ANDERSON

IN November of 1978, the Eagles released their first new music in nearly two years. It was not, as the execs at Warner Brothers had hoped, the follow-up to *Hotel California*, the juggernaut that had become a multi-platinum, Grammy-winning albatross around the band's collective neck. It was instead the Eagles' one and only holiday single, comprised of a cover of "Please Come Home For Christmas" – which had first been a hit for its original performer and co-writer Charles Brown in 1961 and a household favourite for Henley growing up – with a shockingly fine P-Funk impression named "Funky New Year" on the B-side.

The throwaway nature of this hastily conceived release was compounded by the snide cover image of bare-chested band members enjoying an eminently Malibu-style Christmas, poolside with lady companions, cool beverages and a sad-looking artificial tree. Yet Henley's achingly sincere rendition of Brown's yuletide blues earned it both a Top 20 placing upon its original release and a prime spot on seasonal playlists for many holidays to come. What began as a lark to get the record company off their backs also turned out to be a welcome gift to fans, albeit one whose spirit of bonhomie made it entirely unrepresentative of their gruelling experience recording their sixth and final (for phase one) studio album. There were no tidings of comfort and joy to be found in the longplayer that emerged nearly a year later; only humbug.

Nor did *The Long Run* look like the blockbuster the record company craved when it arrived in stores the following September. With its stark, none more black cover art, it bears a resemblance to a plaque on a war memorial, which seems fitting. Often caustic and combative, *The Long Run* is a dark-hearted album in many respects. It's coarser and rawer in musical terms too, the songs' sharp edges less likely to be softened by those signature vocal harmonies or Don Felder's soaring leads than ever before. Even when compared to the most cynical moments of *Hotel California* and *One Of These Nights*, it can feel harsh and brittle. But as a reflection of the anxieties, acrimonies, and exhaustion that dogged the Eagles in the final years of their original run, it may be more honest than any of its creators intended.

That the album got finished at all must've seemed like a Christmas miracle to the men who made it, as well as to the execs who'd taken to calling it 'The Long One' as the months dragged on and the bills for studio time with producer Bill Szymczyk in Miami and Los Angeles mounted. Henley later cited $800,000 as the final cost.

As he explained to *Rolling Stone* in 2016, many of the problems stemmed from starting when they did. "When we began the process of recording that album, we were completely burned out. We were physically, emotionally, spiritually, and creatively exhausted. Our collective tank was empty. We'd been touring relentlessly, even in between recording sessions. We should have taken a one-year hiatus, but the Big Machine demanded to be fed."

> **"All rock'n'roll bands are on the verge of breaking up at all times"**
> **TIMOTHY B SCHMIT**

There certainly hadn't been much time to take stock after the departure of Randy Meisner, who'd reached his personal limit during a post-show confrontation with Glenn Frey in June of 1977 in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was replaced by Timothy B. Schmit, the same high-tenor-voiced bassist who'd taken over Meisner's parts when he quit Poco in 1969. The mellow Schmit ▶

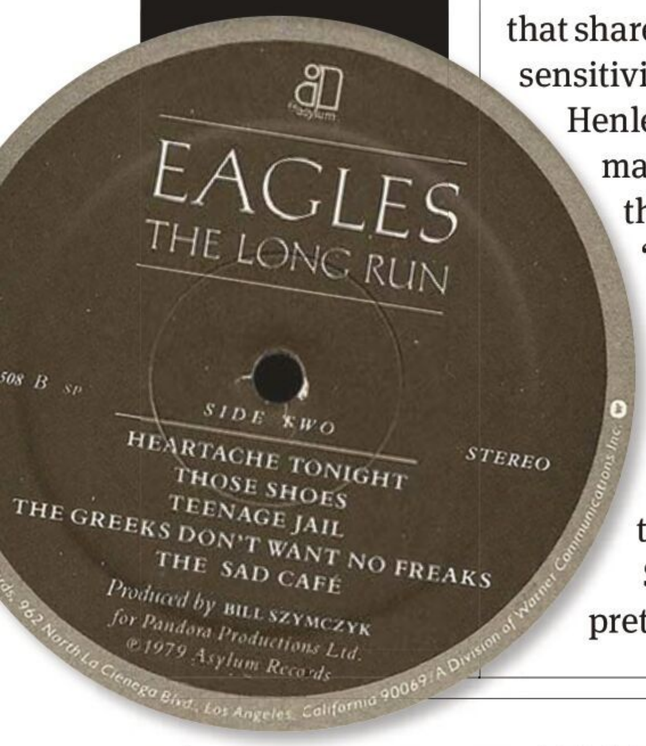
EAGLES

THE LONG RUN

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"*The Long Run* is a shallow, half-baked collection of songs that either repeat old formulae quite brazenly or else, in an attempt to expand the band's work in the precincts of oddball humour, find themselves stuck with an intriguing conceit for a title that chief composers Henley and Frey quickly discover they can't extend into anything of any consequence... The Eagles, once the epitome of LA mellowness, had with the help of Joe Walsh become a creditable hard rock band... but so much for the preconceptions and expectations..."
NICK KENT, NME, SEPTEMBER 29, 1979

"This new album at least sounds like a typical Eagles compilation, producer Bill Szymczyk having departed little from the layered vocals and orchestral/soft-rock whimsy of the past. It also contains two songs which on anyone else's album would be impressive, if not rivetingly memorable... If you really love the Eagles, lash the cash on Blue Steel's debut import. That's where their spirit still flies."
MARK WILLIAMS, MM, SEPTEMBER 29, 1979



was happy to be on salary for one of America's biggest bands, even if he was now trapped in the demilitarised zone between the Eagles' two main factions, with Henley and Frey on one side and Felder and Joe Walsh on the other. Then again, as Schmit ruefully noted in the *History Of The Eagles* documentary, "In my experience, all rock'n'roll bands are on the verge of breaking up at all times."

In any case, Schmit was the source and singer of the first song to be completed for *The Long Run* in Miami in March of 1978. A beautifully spare R&B ballad as rendered by the Eagles at their smoothest, "I Can't Tell You Why" evoked the best of Al Green both in Schmit's tender delivery and Henley's canny approximation of the deep-in-pocket grooves of Hi Rhythm Section drummer Howard Grimes. Meanwhile, Schmit deftly portrayed a fraught state of romantic co-dependency in lyrics that shared the combination of sensitivity and solipsism found in Henley and Frey's love songs. It made for an impressive debut by the newly minted Eagle – "There's your hit," Henley told Schmit during the session. Released nearly two years later as *The Long Run*'s second single, it became the Eagles' final Top 10 entry on the Hot 100.

Schmit's song proved to be pretty much the only thing that came together during the first months of recording. So painstaking about the songs they created together for *Hotel California*, Henley and Frey grew ever more dispirited and discouraged as their few scraps of song ideas failed to cohere or develop into anything much and the band's early plan to create a double album was abandoned. The most infamous of the sessions' many cast-offs was "You're Really High, Aren't You?", which Felder described as a heavy rock track missing only its lyrics though Henley claimed it only existed as a joke title.

As the holiday single came and went - along with the $1 million bonus Warners offered for a finished album in time for Christmas 1978 – the band's ordeal stretched into 1979. According to a *Rolling Stone* cover story later that year, respite from the tedium mostly involved "monstering" (Eaglespeak for ingesting whatever substances were needed for that evening's post-session bender) and/or bullying punk rock bands Henley and Frey happened to come across. "They don't look so tough," Frey says of an unlucky act they spotted one night at the Troubadour. "They look like dorks."

THE finish line got closer thanks to some more help from writers outside the fold. Frey's relationship with Bob Seger dated back to their time together in Detroit, when the teenager became a de facto kid brother to the rocker. (Frey can be heard playing acoustic guitar and singing backup on the original 1969 studio version of "Ramblin' Gamblin' Man".) After Frey and JD Souther called Seger to share some verses they'd been working on, he gave them a chorus he had kicking around. Henley became the fourth writer on "Heartache Tonight" as the band gradually refined what Seger might've moulded into another retro-flavoured Motor City bruiser like his 1978 hit "Old Time Rock & Roll". That's not to suggest Frey's ferocious vocal performance is anything less than one of his crowning achievements as an Eagle and the same goes for Joe Walsh's razor slash of slide guitar. In a move that anticipated the increasingly synth- and drum-machine-friendly nature of his '80s solo work, Henley used a Pollard Syndrum to perfect the iconic claps in his rhythm track.

According to Walsh, "Heartache Tonight" became the turning point for the band, helping bring an end to a process Henley called "excruciatingly painful". Sure enough, "Heartache Tonight" rocketed to No 1 just as *The Long Run* arrived. Yet listeners expecting more of the single's swagger – or for that matter the softer curves of "I Can't Tell You Why" – found a work that was more forbidding than any prior Eagles album. Even the seemingly amiable statement of unity and resilience in the opening title track came with a seething edge. Alongside from-the-playbook sweet nothings ("*didn't know I was so lonely 'til*

"Our collective tank was empty": the Eagles in 1977, with new bassist Timothy B Schmit far right

I found you") came doses of he-man braggadocio ("*all the debutantes in Houston, baby, couldn't hold a candle to you*") and expressions of outright contempt ("*did you do it for spite? Did you think you had to, honey?*"). Now in their early thirties and ageing out of a music scene that had moved on without them as audiences found newer thrills in disco and punk, the Eagles didn't bother to mask their grievances as they boasted about who's going to make it in the long run. "*Kinda bent but we ain't breakin'*", Henley sang over a stately, Stax/Volt-inspired backing. He may have known his band was in tatters but no one was going to catch him copping to that.

After the momentary respite of "I Can't Tell You Why", the album's first side just gets nastier. Indeed, finding a recycled Joe Walsh solo track three tracks in must've seemed like a middle-finger salute to everyone who'd waited so patiently for a new Eagles album. Though credited to the band, "In The City" was virtually indistinguishable from the version that appeared on the previous year's soundtrack for director Walter Hill's gangs-of-New-York thriller *The Warriors*, with Walsh sharing writing credits with Barry De Vorzon, the composer of the film's score. Though the song's inclusion reeks of an effort to fill out the album's running time, it still provides the proceedings with some satisfyingly meaty guitar riffage. It also shares the film's acerbic take on urban existence and societal decline a decade after the Summer of Love.

Rife with the band's disdain for the music that had overtaken the charts while flagship acts like Fleetwood Mac, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and themselves toiled in overpriced studios, "The Disco Strangler" is a vicious little rocker that ridicules the hedonism of the club scene (as opposed to their preferred variety of hedonism). In their misogynistic tale, a comely clubber "*lookin' for the good life*" and "*dressed to kill*" falls prey to a night-time Lucifer, suffering an ugly fate not unlike Diane Keaton's heroine in *Looking for Mr Goodbar*. It's matched for its meanness by "The King Of Hollywood", a musically plodding and lyrically scabrous portrait of a sexually predatory Hollywood producer that feels like Henley's attempt to settle scores with movie bigwigs after big-screen versions of *Desperado* and *Hotel California* failed to get off the ground.

After opening with a flash of the old brio with "Heartache Tonight", *The Long Run*'s second side descends into the same foul mood. That said, for a band that hated disco, "Those Shoes" is a surprisingly fine example of how well the era's rock giants often co-opted its tactics. (The Beastie Boys and Eric B. & Rakim later made cunning use of its groove.) Henley's lyrics again portray LA as a morally bankrupt hellhole, expressing his contempt about singles on the make and "*those jerkoffs in their fancy cars*", though at least this time he spares the females in the song from murder and sexual assault. The same may not be true of "Teenage Jail", which seems to depict a comeuppance for yet another young woman but the song's dirge-like nature discourages efforts to unpack the lyrics by Henley, Frey, and Souther.

The energy runs higher in "The Greeks Don't Want No Freaks", an enthusiastic homage to '60s frat-rock acts like ? & the Mysterians that was probably a hoot to record (especially with Jimmy Buffett in the studio) but feels too rote to ever join "96 Tears" in the set list of any self-respecting garage band. Henley later described laughing when he heard the song on the radio. "We were so miserable making that album that it actually got funny at one point," he said. "Our humour got very dark and very sick."

As a throwback, the song also complements the more sweetly nostalgic note in the album's closer, "The Sad Café", an elegiac ballad whose supply of grace provides a welcome counterbalance to the rancour elsewhere in the album. The band dedicated the song to the memory of John Barrick, a former manager for the Byrds and the Eagles who also tended bar at the Troubadour. Capped off by David Sanborn's gorgeous sax solo, the song and the album end with an expression of wistfulness, leaving listeners with the suggestion that this world might be good for something after all, even if that something has long since receded into the mists of time.

> **"We were so miserable making that album that it got funny"**
> **DON HENLEY**

The past had its appeal but the present and immediate future for the Eagles were bleaker propositions and the final round of intraband fisticuffs arrived the following summer. Given all that went down in the miserable years since *Hotel California*, the end ought to have come a whole lot sooner. Yet the many moments of greatness on *The Long Run* prove there was still some blood to be squeezed out of this jagged, jet-black stone.

SLEEVE NOTES THE LONG RUN

1 The Long Run ★★★★
2 I Can't Tell You Why ★★★★★
3 In The City ★★★
4 The Disco Strangler ★★
5 King Of Hollywood ★★
6 Heartache Tonight ★★★★★
7 Those Shoes ★★★
8 Teenage Jail ★★
9 The Greeks Don't Want No Freaks ★★★
10 The Sad Café ★★★★

LABEL: Asylum/Elektra/Warner
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk, The Eagles
RECORDED AT: Bayshore Recording Studios, Coconut Grove, Florida; Britannia Recording Studio, Los Angeles; Love 'n' Comfort, Los Angeles; One Step Up, Los Angeles; The Record Plant, Los Angeles
PERSONNEL: Don Felder (guitars, organ, vocals), Glenn Frey (vocals, guitars, keyboards), Don Henley (vocals, drums, percussion), Timothy B Schmit (vocals, bass guitar), Joe Walsh (vocals, guitars, keyboards), Jimmy Buffett (backing vocals), The Monstertones (backing vocals), David Sanborn (alto saxophone), Bob Seger (backing vocals), Joe Vitale (piano, electric piano)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 4; US 1

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 7, 1980

EAGLES LIVE

"Three more songs 'til I kick your ass…" Dubbing over the cracks, the Eagles' sanitised, tour-spanning live document airbrushes out all sign of disintegration. BY NICK HASTED

ON the Eagles' debut, Glyn Johns drilled them in the studio 'til they could tape live, barely needing overdubs. For their final album before splitting, they reversed the process. *Eagles Live* was an infamous contradiction in terms, judged by the *Rolling Stone Record Guide* as "probably the most overdubbed [*live album*] in history". This further refined their actual live sound, already honed from the Eagles' earliest days into dogged simulacra of their records, the harmonies eerily perfect, the arrangements just so, rare slots for spontaneous solos effortfully bolted on. In a decade when the Stones mastered the stage art of almost falling apart – a ragged, cliff-edge thrill – the Eagles defined the opposite extreme, valuing accurate professionalism. *Eagles Live* was never going to be a notably raw affair.

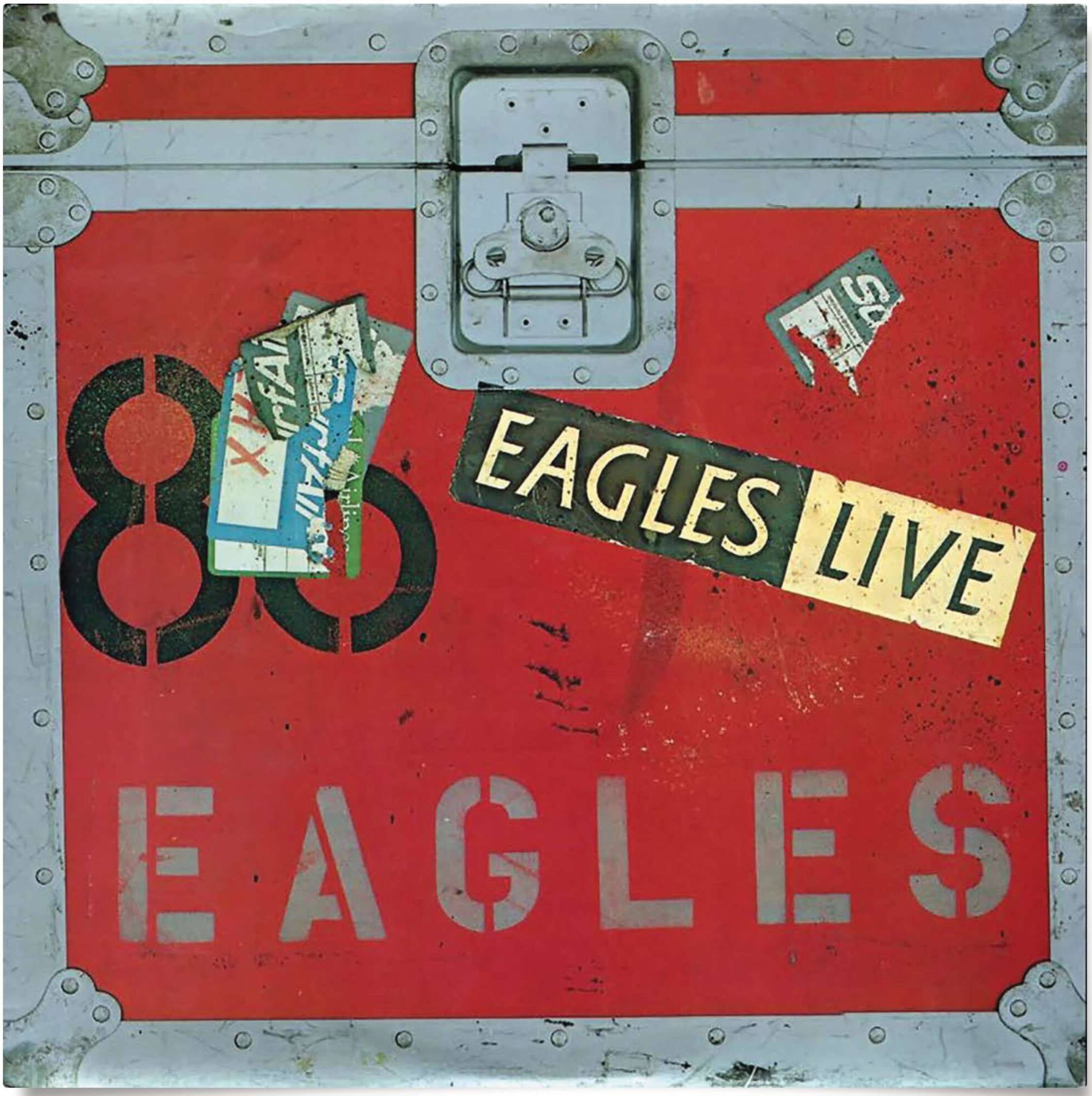
The habit of "dropping in" fixes was anyway second nature by now, reflecting the band's personal decline from the dutiful tyros Johns schooled in 1971. "Vocal punching", Don Henley told *Record* magazine, became essential because "there was so much grass and other illegal substances being ingested, and there was so much pressure and so little sleeping being done, that it was the only way we could get decent vocals going". The end of *The Long Run* tour on 31 July, 1980 at California's Long Beach Arena, one of the nights taped for *Eagles Live*, was still more fraught. At a benefit for the re-election of local Democrat Senator Alan Cranston, the band could no longer muster the niceties even for the night's supposed point, Don Felder muttering "Thanks – I guess" when Cranston's wife thanked them for their help. By the show itself, Felder and Frey each recalled informing the other of the kicking in store once they got offstage, while keeping harmony formation on "Best Of My Love".

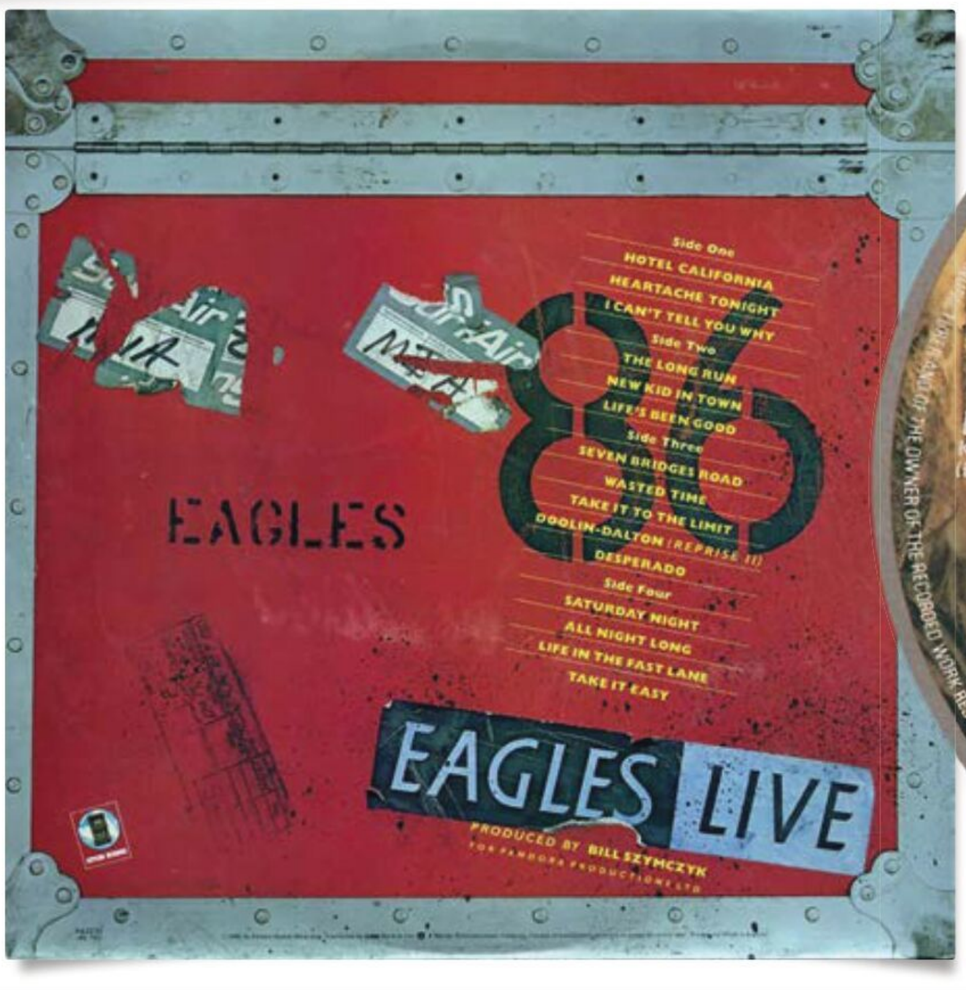
Frey served notice on the band in a call to Henley shortly afterwards. "I knew the Eagles were over about halfway through the *Long Run* album," he told the *LA Times*, suggesting the whole subsequent tour had been an unfortunate chore for the former friends. *Eagles Live*'s mixing and fixing was therefore, much like The Beatles' swansong *Let It Be* when it limped into 1970, a posthumous affair. Producer Bill Szymczyk left his assistant with Frey in LA, while the rest of the band Frey had already quit assembled in Miami, to construct three-part harmonies and instrumental overlays for an album only being made, anyway, as a contractual obligation, so the Eagles could wash their hands of each other. Tapes were FedExed back and forth for surgery. It was an odd way to make rock'n'roll.

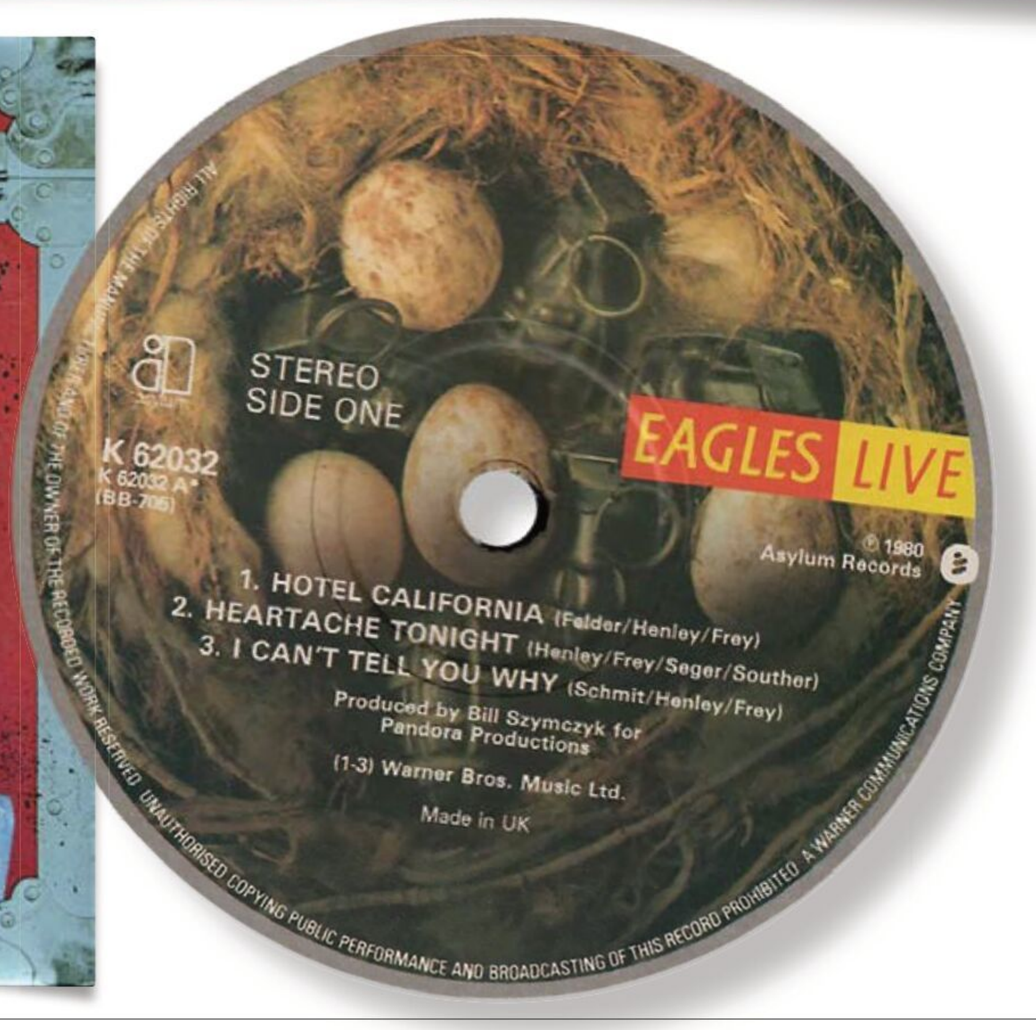
Tapes were FedExed back and forth for surgery, an odd way to make rock'n'roll

Reviews of *The Long Run* tour give a taste of the concert experience *Eagles Live* dubiously documents. *Record Mirror*'s Mark Cooper caught it at the Oakland Coliseum in March 1980, shortly before the notorious "Long Night At Long Beach", with Roy Orbison playing his vocally peerless hits in support, and a crowd split between young high school kids and the thirtyish, hippy generation. "The stage is covered with more guitars than I've seen on a stage," Cooper reported.

"After every number the Eagles turn round and change [*them*] with machine-like precision. There's a methodical joylessness... none of them smile." At the Boston Globe in December 1979, *Rolling Stone* saw even the matchless opening number fall victim to the miserable vibe. "Slow-moving, without a word of greeting or an emcee's introduction, they began playing the languid, foreboding lead- ▶


EAGLES LIVE
EAGLES


Side One
HOTEL CALIFORNIA
HEARTACHE TONIGHT
I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY
Side Two
THE LONG RUN
NEW KID IN TOWN
LIFE'S BEEN GOOD
Side Three
SEVEN BRIDGES ROAD
WASTED TIME
TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT
DOOLIN-DALTON (REPRISE II)
DESPERADO
Side Four
SATURDAY NIGHT
ALL NIGHT LONG
LIFE IN THE FAST LANE
TAKE IT EASY
EAGLES
EAGLES LIVE
PRODUCED BY BILL SZYMCZYK


STEREO
SIDE ONE
K 62032
K 62032 A*
(BB-705)
EAGLES LIVE
℗ 1980
Asylum Records
1. HOTEL CALIFORNIA (Felder/Henley/Frey)
2. HEARTACHE TONIGHT (Henley/Frey/Seger/Souther)
3. I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY (Schmit/Henley/Frey)
Produced by Bill Szymczyk for
Pandora Productions
(1-3) Warner Bros. Music Ltd.
Made in UK
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in to 'Hotel California'... The delivery was understated almost to the point of nihilism. With Don Henley singing lead from behind his drum kit, the lack of action at the front of the stage gave an extra turn-of-the-screw to the song's dirge-like cadence."

By this time, the live Eagles were unquestionably Joe Walsh's band, his maverick energy – and solo songs – the jolt the band's old-timers needed, as he led them, marvelled *Rolling Stone*, "with more energy than he's shown since his days in the James Gang". The main set finished with a Walsh hit, "Turn To Stone", and he concluded proceedings by mock-threatening to smash his acoustic guitar, in Who-like satire of the Eagles more sedate MO. The band bulked up their first live album with four cuts from the *Hotel California* tour, too. Observing a 1976 gig at Philadelphia's Spectrum, *Melody Maker* had already noted new boy Walsh's impact, "urging on the attack", and improbably sparking his laid-back bandmates into "a rock'n'roll machine with plenty of guts". This was the raw material *Eagles Live* worked with.

It's perhaps a tribute to all those illicit overdubs, then, that this is no dispirited tombstone to the Eagles' monumental career, no record of drab, rote shows, bad faith and bad vibes, but rather a decent and varied summation of their music, in a sort of informal sequel to their *Greatest Hits*. It starts of course with "Hotel California", wild cheers in the dark and the sound of a guitar warming up sufficiently setting the live album scene. Then Don Felder's 12-string introduces the stately theme, Frey and Walsh layer on a foreboding mood, and Henley's vocal kicks things up a gear. The guitars become ghostly Greek choruses to the "*voices in the corridor*" he hears in rock's equivalent to the Bates Motel, the establishment where a self-consciously golden generation came to sleep off and entomb their ideals. Twinned guitar solos have an immaculate surety, even a flash of feedback never straying off piste, imaginative improvisation not really the point. For all its considerable resemblance to the studio version already in the homes of 20 million Americans, this "Hotel California" is hard to deny.

Eagles Live's most dated aspect is the preponderance of cuts from the arduously recorded, little loved *The Long Run*, the reason for the band's last, fatal tour. Three of its songs follow, and at least show the Eagles' range. "Heartache Tonight", a US No 1, is the sort of chugging heartland rocker Frey might have been making if he'd joined Bob Seger's band as planned in 1967. The middle-eight's doowop harmonies also betray the musicians' roots, while the lyric's depiction of teenage lust is an accurately desperate, dubious thing, Frey warning: "*Someone's gonna hurt someone, before the night is through/...Everybody wants to touch somebody, if it takes all night*". It supports Frey's self-image as a rocker, so derided by Glyn Johns at the Eagles' start. "Party, baby!" he cries at the end, in another vérité moment to remind you just how live this all is.

No record of drab, rote shows, it's a decent, varied summation of their music

"I Can't Tell You Why" takes a remarkable turn to quiet storm R&B, Timothy Schmit singing the high, sweet, Bee Gees-like lead over synth-strings and padding drums. Harmonies sound punched in, and there's another static guitar solo, but this is a lovely, lovelorn disco-era ballad, its style of drifting different to the band's usual soft rock. It suggests one way they might have continued in the '80s. Henley then introduces "The Long Run" as "our tribute to Memphis, Tennessee". A song which doubles as a doubt-riven tribute to the band's endurance ("*Who is going to make it? We'll find out, in the long run*") rides out on Phil Kenzie's honking, rock'n'roll alto saxophone solo. Liverpudlian Kenzie, also employed on *Let It Be*, took the place here of smooth jazz maestro David Sanborn, improbably used earlier on the tour.

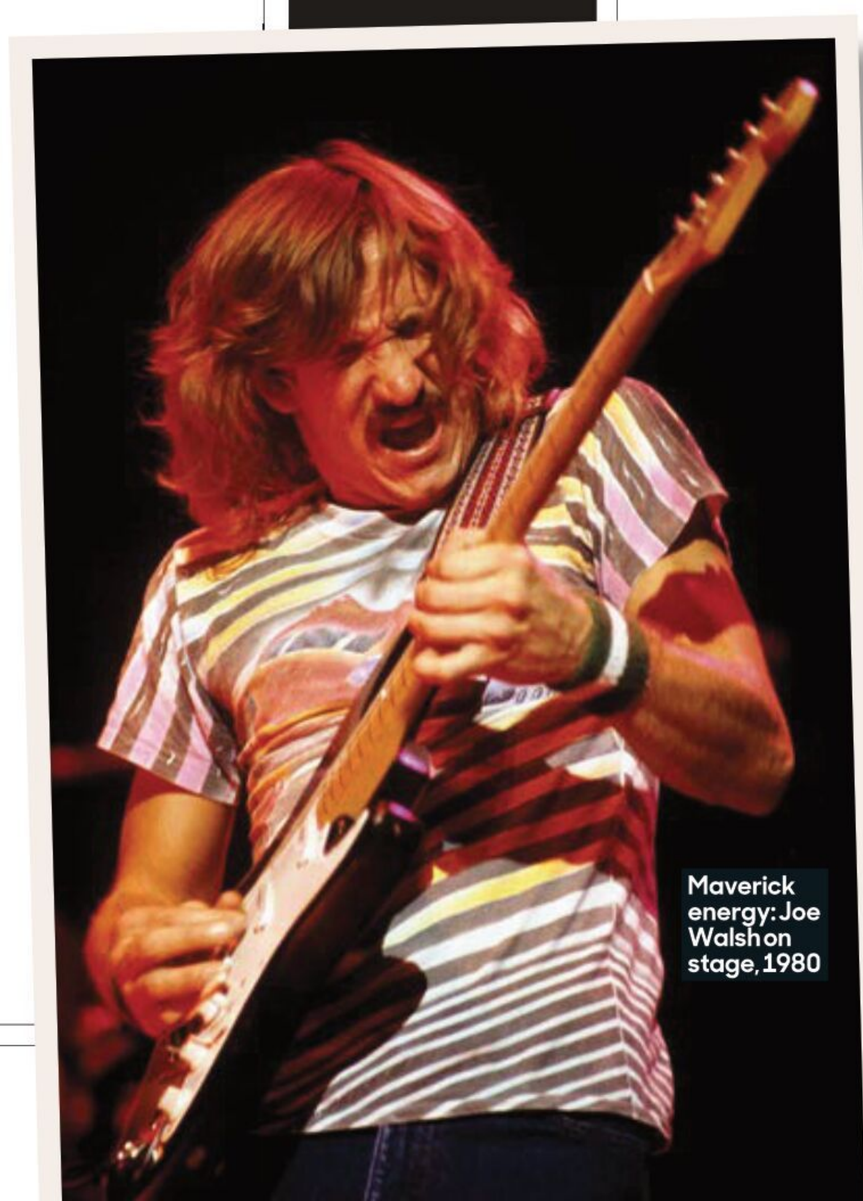
Eagles Live then time-travels unannounced to 1976, and the laid-back country-rock which once defined the Eagles, lacking 'til now. Organist Vince Melamed and JD Souther clamber onstage for the latter's co-write, "New Kid In Town", as Frey begins this elegant LA *la ronde*, with its subtext of a rock star's inevitable showbiz fall. The music's cantina shuffle is dignified by Frey's delicate ruefulness, a gentle balladeer's touch at odds with his earlier rocking, while perfectly creamy country harmonies operate in counterpoint. As he sings this US chart-topper at the Eagles' apex, its "*talk on the street*" whispers that it won't last.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"This behemoth known as 'the live two-record set' has long been viewed as a most spurious option by the discerning rock pundit. *Eagles Live* simply takes all the shortcomings previously noted and spreads them over four sides of vinyl. The Eagles have always been pretty much a studio band clumsily attempting to work up a separate identity for stage-work primarlily by utilising the presence of Joe Walsh to provide humour and a few rough edges. With this, however, the band drop any pretensions of toughening up and using old songs as vehicles for 'the radical reinterpretation'..."
NICK KENT, NME, , NOVEMBER 22, 1980

SIDE two of *Eagles Live* ends with the epic showpiece which defined their final tour as much as "Hotel California", demonstrating the considerable gulf between Eagles '76 and '80. Introduced as "the next President of the United States" in a standing tour joke, Joe Walsh staggers to the front like the last Fabulous Furry Freak Brother, while also bringing more contemporary, knowing, *National Lampoon* humour. "Hey, man – I'm freakin' out," he gasps. "I appreciate your vote, and here is an industrial love song." "Life's Been Good" wasn't even an Eagles tune, but a 1978 Walsh solo hit. Its opening riff was tough enough for Rick Rubin to sample Walsh's version to give Eminem's Def Jam tribute "So Far..." its swagger, and when it kicks in here, we are no longer in country-rock Kansas. Walsh's vocal abrasively scrapes his upper register as if dragged over sandpaper, and his guitar is low-down and dirty, as he describes a ludicrous, wholly autobiographical day in a rock star's life. He gifts the Eagles a sensibility neither Frey nor Henley could manage, a careless, sardonic wit and sozzled liberty very different to the literary, couched causticness of "Hotel California". The kids in the crowd happily cheer every mention of drugs and booze, and clap along. In the course of the song's nine minutes, the strange popping sound of Walsh's ARP Odyssey synth running interference on his majestically languid guitar solo leaves regular Eagles business in the shade, even as the lyrics perfectly and unabashedly describe their actual, aimlessly decadent lives. Walsh, Felder and Frey conclude with a gleeful guitar blow-out.

A $2 million Asylum bribe for the band to record two new songs for *Eagles Live* was spurned, but "Life's Been Good" is an already substantial bonus. Side 3 then starts with the


Maverick energy: Joe Walsh on stage, 1980

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

Approaching the end of a long run: Glenn Frey, Don Henley and Don Felder on stage, 1980

lonesome harmonies and bluegrass picking of another song new to the Eagles, "Seven Bridges Road". Written by country-rock pioneer Steve Young for his 1969 *Rock Salt & Nails* album, which had Gene Clark and Gram Parsons on board, it returned the Eagles to their Troubadour start. Indeed, it was after sociable nights there, English folkie Iain Matthews recalled, that Henley would dig out his copy of Matthews' *Valley Hi* album, featuring a Matthews-Mike Nesmith arrangement of "Seven Bridges Road" startingly similar to *Eagles Live*'s effort. Regardless of this "borrowing", or any studio touching up, the Eagles still had to sing it, and the opening acoustic strum, three-part inhale of breath and perfect a cappella harmonies are quite gorgeous. It was the last US hit of the band's original lifetime.

We're then back in 1976, for *Hotel California*'s Philly soul tribute "Wasted Time". Gospel-soul organ and plaintive piano accompany Henley's anguished, blue-eyed soul vocal, which Daryl Hall wouldn't disown. "*I coulda done so many things, baby*", he cries, "*if I could only stop my mind*". The big finish resembles a '70s Wings ballad. "Take It To The Limit" then gives Randy Meisner, a sacked ex-Eagle by 1980, his soaring vocal moment, before Henley's "Desperado" adds a taste of the burnt-out Southern Californian romance which became their (and pal Warren Zevon's) terrain.

Returning to 1980, *Desperado*'s "Saturday Night" is another country-rock ballad, before Walsh loans his *Urban Cowboy* soundtrack hit single, "All Night Long". This modern, redneck paean to paycheque Saturday nights – "*We like a long neck and a good old song/Turn it up, and then we sing along*" – is again quite out of character for the other Eagles, and their nostalgic country notions. The roadies symptomatically sing back-up as the Monstertones.

"Life In The Fast Lane" is the version from Long Beach, the night the Eagles' exhausting ride finally crashed. You can't hear the end coming. Their first hit, "Take It Easy", which so defined the original band with Leadon and Meisner, is the 1980 version's chosen conclusion. Glenn Frey leads the harmonies, singing of simpler, happier times in Southern California, a dream which had become an offstage nightmare, ended now.

SLEEVE NOTES EAGLES LIVE

1 Hotel California ★★★
2 Heartache Tonight ★★★
3 I Can't Tell You Why ★★★
4 The Long Run ★★★
5 New Kid In Town ★★★
6 Life's Been Good ★★★★
7 Seven Bridges Road ★★★★
8 Wasted Time ★★★★
9 Take It To The Limit ★★★
10 Doolin-Dalton (Reprise II) ★★
11 Desperado ★★★
12 Saturday Night ★★★
13 All Night Long ★★★
14 Life In The Fast Lane ★★
15 Take It Easy ★★★

LABEL: Asylum
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, Long Beach Arena and The Forum, Inglewood, all California
PERSONNEL: Don Henley (vocals, drums, percussion), Glenn Frey (rhythm guitar, keyboards, vocals), Don Felder (guitar, harmony and backing vocals), Randy Meisner, Timothy B Schmit (bass, vocals), Joe Walsh (vocals, guitar, keyboards), Joe Vitale (piano, organ, drums, percussion), Jage Jackson (rhythm guitar, percussion), Vince Melamed (electric piano), Phil Kenzie (alto saxophone), JD Souther (vocals, acoustic guitar), The Monstertones (backing vocals)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 24; US 6

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

Named and famed: the Eagles at a press conference in Tokyo, February 1976

The EAGLES' SINGLES

From truckers' trysts to relationship breakdowns, via fast living and haunted hotels – all the band's 45s assessed.

BY MARK BEAUMONT

TO study the singles output of the Eagles is, initially at least, to watch grifters become godheads. The band's earliest classics – "Take It Easy" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling" – came about from Glenn Frey keeping his ear to the ground of the Californian folk and country scene, spotting great songs that a Jackson Browne or a Jack Tempchin hadn't quite brought to their fullest potential, and eagerly spinning them up into pop-country gold for his nascent new band. Long-standing songwriting partnerships were forged in these successes, but as Frey and Don Henley sat down for their first co-writing sessions ahead of *Desperado*, the Eagles were already becoming formidable hitmakers in their own right.

Their skills were in irrepressible melody, inviting mood and a stylistic adaptability which allowed them to variously tackle hard rock, boogie blues, R&B, mariachi, soul and even, towards the end of their first decade together, a sly spot of disco without scaring their core folk/country horses. A canny grasp of the '70s mindset was key too. Their foundations were in the romantic tribulations of the hard-working, hard-drinking and likely hard-trucking folk of the American heartlands.

These had driven country music for decades, but their distinctly Californian tone and theme – these lyin' eyes belonged to Hollywood gold-diggers; these new kids in town were strutting young rock pretenders on Sunset – gave Eagles music a luxuriant, almost aspirational West Coast slant. "Life In The Fast Lane", for instance, spoke just as much to the trucker working I-44 as the high-end LA hedonist chasing the party to Santa Monica.

They also saw the magic in mythologies, growing in resonance as '60s psychedelia gave way to darker drugs. The Eagles bent an ear to both the Old West fantasia then finding resurgence in the aesthetic of The Band and also the mystical witchery espoused by the hard-rock behemoths of the early '70s – Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, all things prog. "Hotel California" didn't simply materialise out of the desert ether; its mystique was carefully, skilfully constructed.

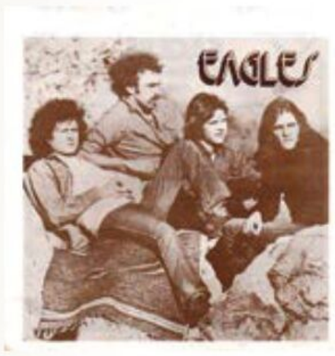
The tensions within the band following the success of *Hotel California* undoubtedly spilled over into their singles canon. The title track from *The Long Run* was a prime example of a band protesting too much – as soon as an act starts declaring themselves stronger than ever, you know the wheels are coming off. Then when, 14 years later, the snow tyres were fitted for their skid through Hell's icier reaches, the gloss and experience of the intervening years shone through on the single releases, very much marking out a distinct Eagles era as elder statesmen of country rock. Whether Henley was telling the whiners of modern America to grow a pair on "Get Over It", or the band were delving elsewhere into midlife marital strife or the aftermath of 9/11, there was a mature assurance to their new music which bolstered their legend.

Their skills were in irrepressible melody, inviting mood and stylistic adaptability

Casting back over their initial run, though, it's easy to see how an Eagles greatest hits compilation would become one of the best-selling records in history. These were songs of vitality and variety, sun-dappled and melodic but unpredictably probing the possibilities of Californian country rock. So drop the needle on all 30 of their singles, and relive a band taking it to the limit.

KOHHASEBE/SHINKOMUSIC/GETTYIMAGES

TAKE IT EASY ASYLUM, 1972



Starting as they meant to go on – chilling at the top end of the *Billboard* chart – the Eagles' debut single told the tale of an Arizona country Casanova keen to add to his romantic "*world of trouble*" via a tryst with a truck-driving lady. A Jackson Browne tune intended for his 1972 debut album, Frey stepped in when Browne struggled to finish it – and completed the track, according to Browne, "in spectacular fashion".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 12; UK –

WITCHY WOMAN ASYLUM, 1972

A song-sketch hangover from Bernie Leadon's stint in the Flying Burrito Brothers, "Witchy Woman" took on a mystical feel once Henley got his hands on it. Sent "semi-delirious" by flu fevers, Henley conjured a psychedelic blues vision of a supernatural seductress inspired by Carlos Castaneda's writings on shamanism, a biography of Zelda Fitzgerald and various LA club party girls.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 9; UK –

PEACEFUL EASY FEELING ASYLUM, 1972

Another Frey magpie acquisition, the Eagles' third 45 was written on the back of an El Centro coffee shop folk show poster by Jack Tempchin. When the latter later appeared in LA folk circles, the song came to Frey's attention and he asked if he could develop it with the Eagles, then just eight days old. The languid cassette version Frey handed him the next day was, Tempchin said, "so good I couldn't believe it".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 20; UK –

TEQUILA SUNRISE ASYLUM, 1973

Not so much named after the cocktail as the regretful hangover from another night on the shots of courage, the first single from *Desperado* emerged from Henley and Frey's first ever stint of co-writing, alongside the title track. Relaxing on the sofa, Frey came up with a riff he described as "kinda Roy Orbison, kinda Mexican", and which would stall at No 64 on the *Billboard* chart twice: once for the Eagles and once in the hands of country star Alan Jackson in 1993.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 64; UK –

OUTLAW MAN ASYLUM, 1973

What's this, out on the ridge? A Wild West drifter with a gun in one hand, the Good Book in the other, a woman long behind him and a godless future out ahead. Little wonder, when the Eagles heard "Outlaw Man" on labelmate and Greenwich Village regular David Blue's 1973 album *Nice Baby And The Angel*, that they felt it would fit their Old West-themed second album a treat, with the country-metal endpiece its equivalent of a gunfight scene.

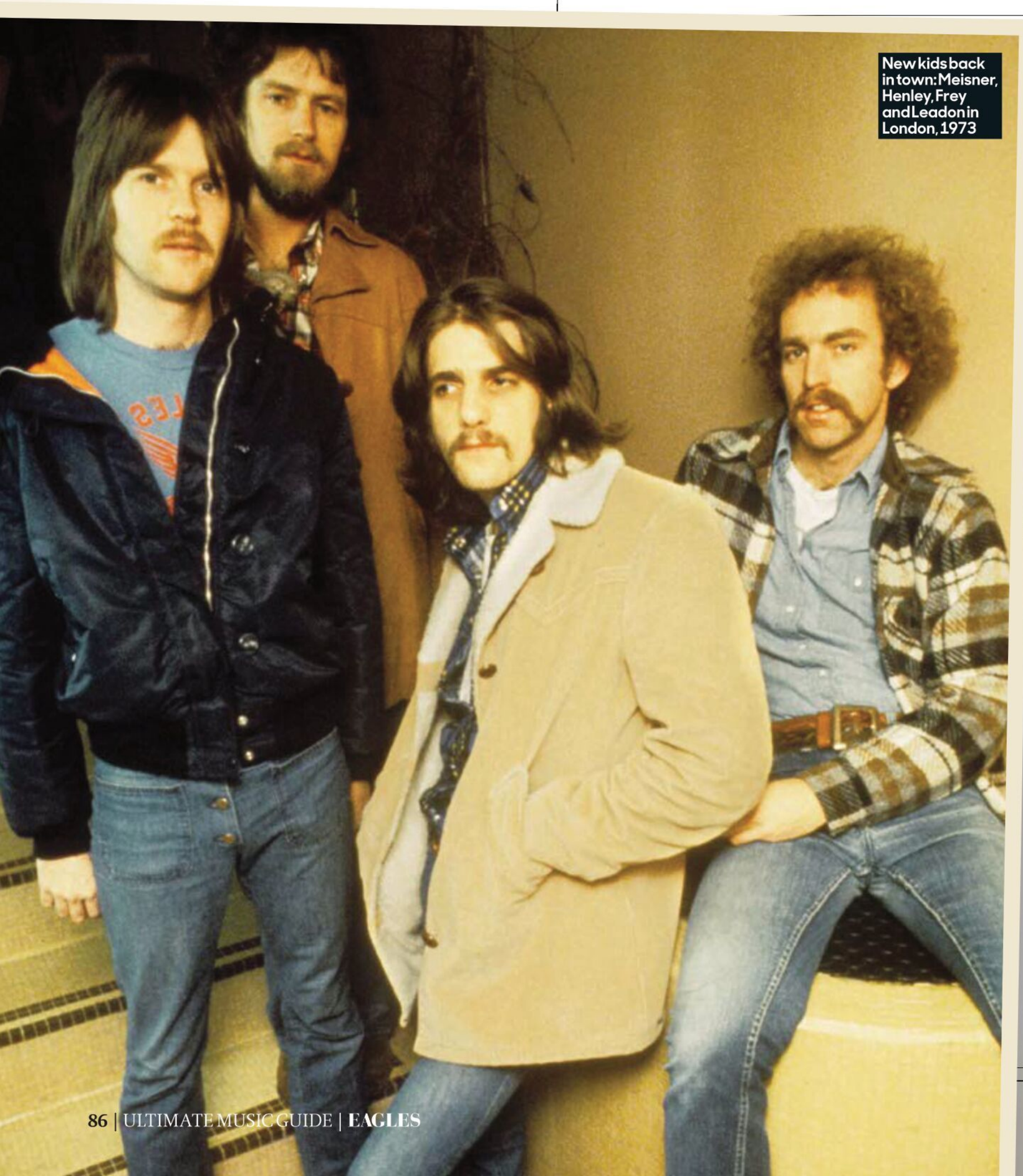
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 59; UK –

ALREADY GONE ASYLUM, 1974

Having scored a hit with "Peaceful Easy Feeling", Jack Tempchin then submitted this road hog of a co-write with fellow LA singer (and soon-to-be-Silverado) Robb Strandlund to the band for *On The Border*. It was among the first songs the Eagles recorded after ditching producer Glyn Johns in London for LA and Bill Szymczyk, in search of a harder rock sound. New lead guitarist Don Felder does a lot of the heavy lifting.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 32; UK –

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS



New kids back in town: Meisner, Henley, Frey and Leadon in London, 1973

JAMES DEAN ASYLUM, 1974

This boogie-woogie tribute to the titular silver screen heartthrob – "*You were too fast to live, too young to die, bye-bye*" – originated when Frey, Henley, Browne and JD Souther got together after a 1972 Tim Hardin show at the Troubadour to jam ideas for a suggested album about anti-heroes. When that album became *Desperado*, "James Dean" was shelved until *On The Border*, from which it became the Eagles' last non-hit of the 20th century.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 77; UK –

BEST OF MY LOVE ASYLUM, 1974

It was Jim Higgs, a local Michigan DJ, who spun "Best Of My Love" rather than *On The Border*'s official singles, told Asylum of the rapturous response, and thus instigated the release of this sumptuous ode to Henley's recent break-up – one of only two usable songs recorded during initial London sessions – as a single. Despite Henley demanding it be pulled when he discovered it had been shortened for radio, the song sold over a million copies and made No 1 on the *Billboard* chart. Farewell obscurity.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 1; UK –

In the gilded palace: Felder, Henley and Walsh pose with various gold discs for *Hotel California*, 1978

ONE OF THESE NIGHTS ASYLUM, 1975

"A nasty track with pretty vocals... a lot of teeth, a lot of bite," was Frey's synopsis of the fourth album's lycanthropic title track, influenced by Al Green, The Spinners and the disco beats of Miami studio-mates The Bee Gees, then turned up to Thin Lizzy by Felder's solo – "a quantum leap... a breakthrough song." Losing much of its intro and soulful fade-out for its single release, it consolidated the Eagles as consistent *Billboard*-toppers.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 1; UK 23

LYIN' EYES ASYLUM, 1975

Written in just two evenings about a "gold-digger" they saw in their favourite LA diner Dan Tana, "Lyin' Eyes" suffered the most drastic cuts for the 7" yet, losing two full minutes of its second verse and chorus and leaving radio listeners in the dark as to the juicier extramarital details. Nonetheless, the tune became the infidelity lament of the '70s and an Eagles evergreen, held off the US top spot only by Elton John's "Island Girl".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 2; UK 23

TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT

ASYLUM, 1975

Another late night on an acoustic guitar after the Troubadour wound up produced Meisner's key contribution to the Eagles' canon, and the only single on which he sang lead. As a sumptuous, string-laden waltz about living life as hard as possible, it undoubtedly benefits from stretching out a minute longer on *One Of These Nights*, but even in truncated single form it's arguably the Eagles' most elegant moment.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 4; UK 12

NEW KID IN TOWN

ASYLUM, 1976

Fame, fickle fame. Penned from a JD Souther chorus during the *Hotel California* writing sessions, the bittersweet lead track from the Eagles' most successful studio album ironically concerned not just a romantic displacement but the threat to their standing from johnny-come-lately rock gunslingers. Souther denied rumours that the song was about Bruce Springsteen – but those rumours were probably in the ballpark.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 1; UK 20

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

ASYLUM, 1977

Checking into the cultural consciousness and never leaving (there have even been plans for a movie of the song) Felder's "Mexican reggae" tune, and he and Walsh's legendary duelling guitar section, thankfully survived the label's suggestion to shorten the track for radio. It's been the archetypal Cali noir song ever since, transposing the inescapable, hedonistic Hollywood allure of the Beverly Hills Hotel into a desert den of freaks, gluttons and spectres.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 1; UK 8

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

ASYLUM, 1977

Flowering from a riff Walsh was toying with in rehearsals and touching on blaxploitation funk, this further ode to taking it to the limit came to Frey while speeding down the highway with his dealer "The Count". The velocity of the track might not have catapulted it as high in the charts as its *Hotel California* album-mates, but was enough to get a rollercoaster named after it at Myrtle Beach's Hard Rock Park in 2008.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 11; UK –

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

PLEASE COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

ASYLUM, 1978

A festive hit for US blues singer Charles Brown in 1961, the Eagles' doo-wop cover became the first Christmas song to hit the *Billboard* Top 20 for 15 years, perhaps by upping the pathos of the song by rewriting Brown's celebratory opening line to have the seasonal bells "*ringing the sad, sad news*" that a solitary Christmas, minus "*baby*" and friends, is imminent. A faint echo of the trouble in Eagles ranks...

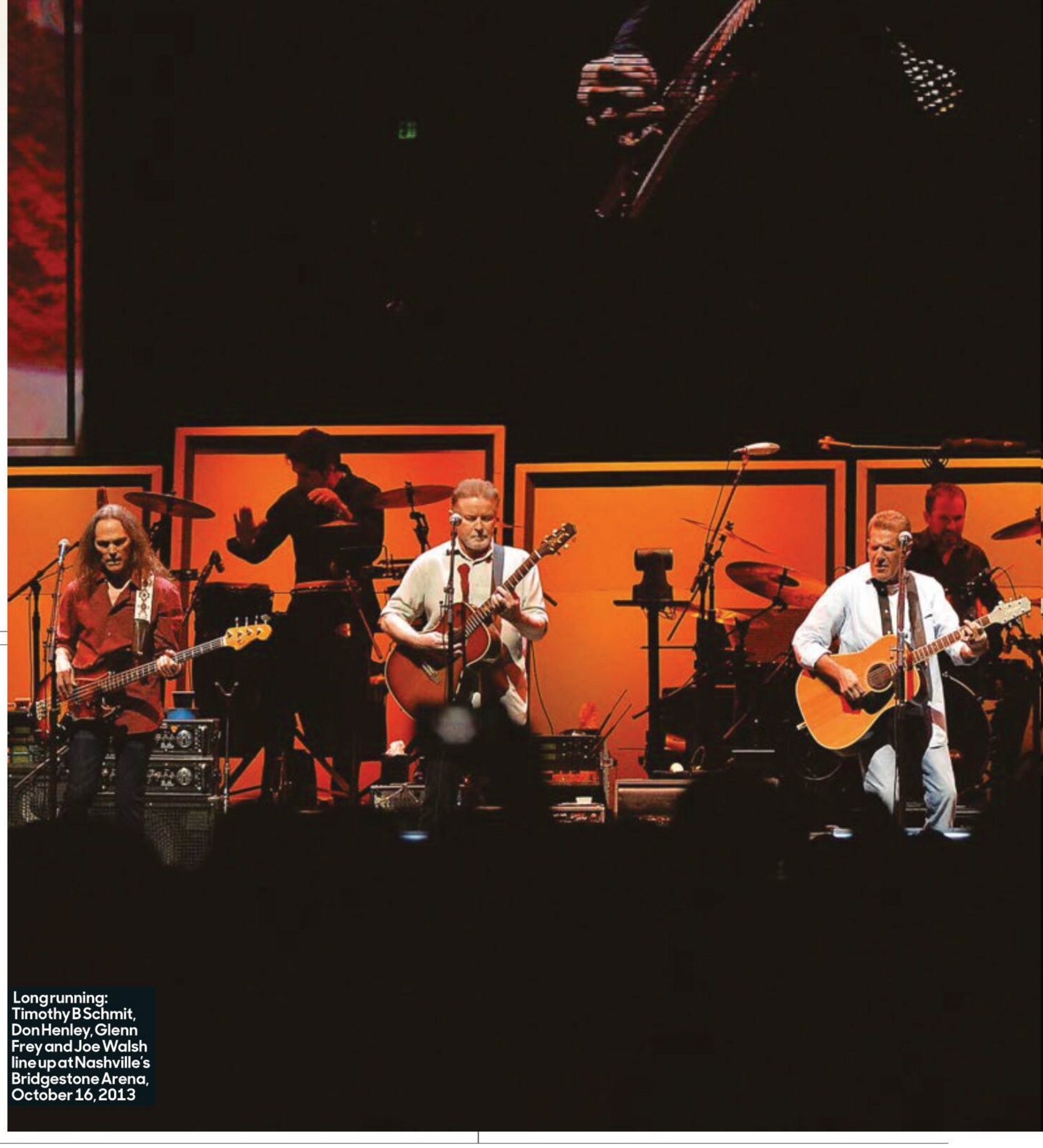
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 18; UK 30

HEARTACHE TONIGHT

ASYLUM, 1979

The Eagles' final US chart-topper, *The Long Run*'s lead single was a real down-the-wires collaboration. Enthused by a glam-friendly first verse he'd jammed out with JD Souther, Frey called Bob Seger to sing him the verse, only for Seger to bawl the bluesy chorus back at him down the phone. Later covered by such luminaries as Tom Jones, Michael Bublé and Conway Twitty (featuring the Osmonds).

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 1; UK 40



Longrunning: Timothy B Schmit, Don Henley, Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh line up at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena, October 16, 2013

THE LONG RUN

ASYLUM, 1979

"*When it all comes down we will still come through*". Trumpeting the Eagles' steadfast longevity through the Disco Wars – in the face of withering notices in the press – *The Long Run*'s title track came with a cheekful of irony; the band were tearing themselves to bits behind the scenes. Its Stax-style swing, on the other hand, has firmly stood the test of time.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 8; UK 66

FOTOSINTERNATIONAL/GETTYIMAGES

SAD CAFÉ/ THOSE SHOES

ASYLUM, 1980

The downbeat conclusion to *The Long Run*, David Sanborn sax solo and all, was a solid if unspectacular choice for the sound of a band winding down its golden age. There's talkbox guitar from Joe Walsh on the flip, though it doesn't do much to lighten the mood.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US– ; UK –

I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY

ASYLUM, 1980

Replacing Meisner on bass during the *Hotel California* tour (just as he had, strangely, in country rockers Poco in 1969), Timothy B Schmit arrived bearing the bones of this "straight Al Green" R&B number, worked up by the band over a couple of all-night sessions. At a playback party after the song was mixed, Henley listened to Schmit's smoky vocals on the track and declared, "There's your first hit". Wasn't wrong.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 8; UK –

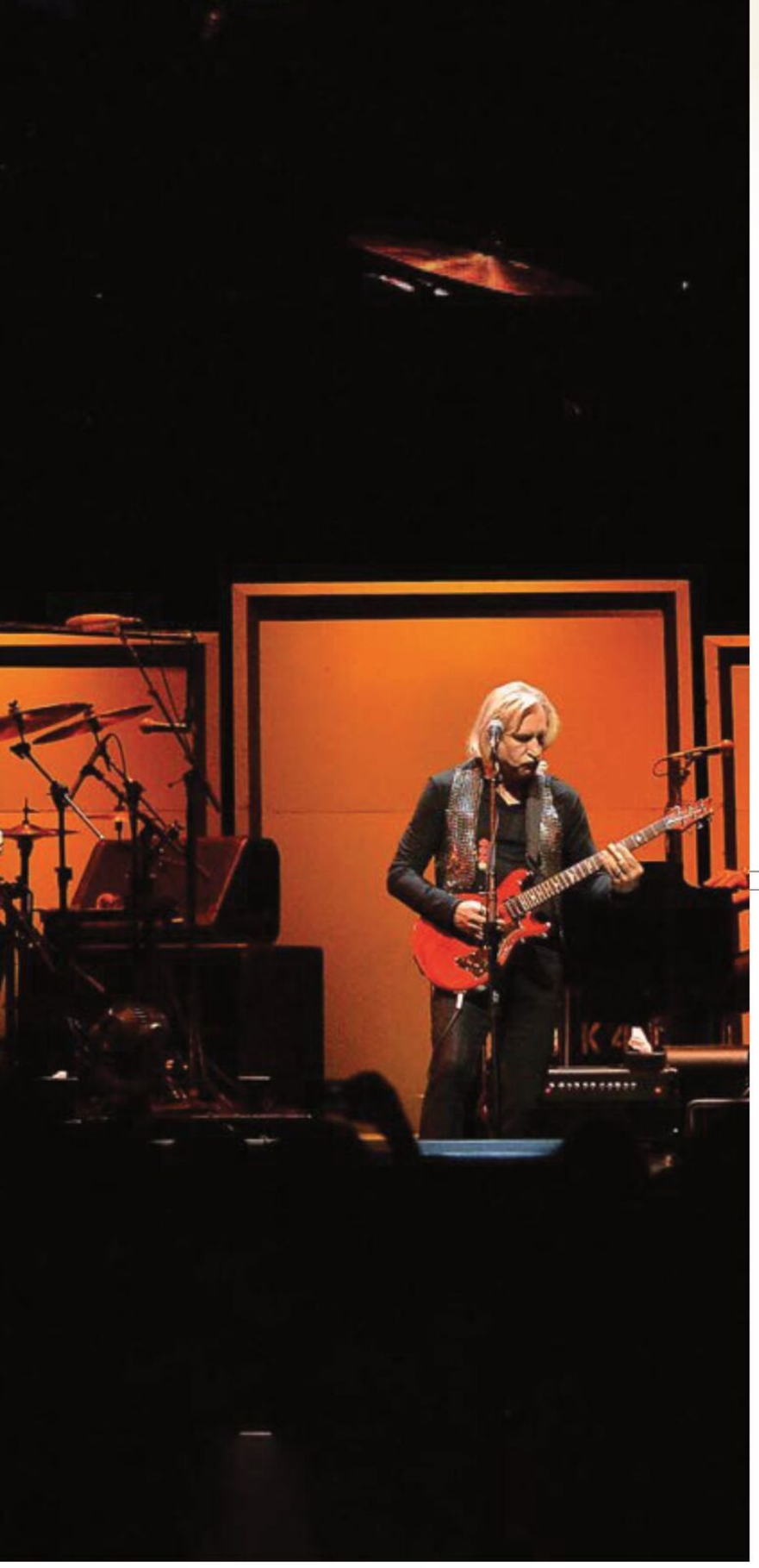
Takin' it easy: Felder, Henley, Walsh and Frey on TV show *Don Kirschner's Rock Concert*, 1979

SEVEN BRIDGES ROAD (LIVE)

ASYLUM, 1980

First appearing on Southern country singer Steve Young's 1969 *Rock Salt & Nails* album, it was Iain Matthews' five-part harmony arrangement on his 1973 LP *Valley Hi* that the Eagles took on the road for their earliest stadium shows, first as vocal warm-up, then as a capella opening number. It returned to their setlist in 1980, with acoustic accompaniment, captured on *Eagles Live* and becoming the final hit of their initial run.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 21; UK –



GET OVER IT

GEFFEN/THE EAGLES RECORDING COMPANY, 1994

Returning to the fray all guns blazing, Henley took aim at over-sensitive types clogging up talk shows and compensation courts on the Eagles' brash and glossy honky-tonk comeback single, culled from *Hell Freezes Over*. It reads like the ravings of an online Trump bot today, but – unsurprisingly, considering – it struck a chord with heartland America and gave the Eagles their final *Billboard* Top 40 hit to date.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 31; UK –

LOVE WILL KEEP US ALIVE

GEFFEN/THE EAGLES RECORDING COMPANY, 1994

When Schmit's proposed supergroup with Paul Carrack and Traffic's Jim Capaldi failed to materialise, Schmit submitted their demos, including the plaintive "Love Will Keep Us Alive", for the Eagles' comeback album, only for manager Irving Azoff to reject them. The song still found its way onto *Hell Freezes Over* and topped the Adult Contemporary chart for three weeks despite not having a formal release.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US – ; UK 52

THE GIRL FROM YESTERDAY

GEFFEN/THE EAGLES RECORDING COMPANY, 1994

All four of the new songs recorded for inclusion on *Hell Freezes Over* found some level of chart success; slide-heavy break-up lament "The Girl From Yesterday" was a modest hit on the US country chart, another notch on the Eagles' bedpost for Jack Tempchin.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US – ; UK –

LEARN TO BE STILL

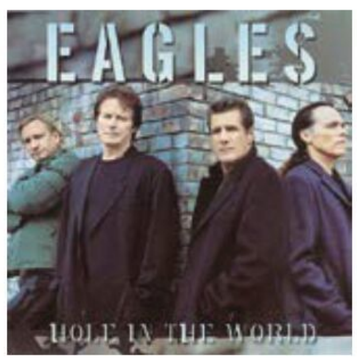
GEFFEN/THE EAGLES RECORDING COMPANY, 1995

Producer, percussionist and friend of Henley, Stan Lynch had just left the drum stool of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers after 18 years when he collaborated with Henley to construct *Hell Freezes Over*. One key contribution was a co-write on the lustrous ballad "Learn To Be Still", a No 15 hit on the Adult Contemporary chart – Henley claimed upon its first live performance that the song had been written just minutes earlier.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US – ; UK –

HOLE IN THE WORLD

THE EAGLES RECORDING COMPANY II, 2003



A stirring Henley/Frey composition calling for peace, love and understanding amid the shockwaves of September 11, "Hole In The World" was the gospel R&B closer and sole new track on 2003's comprehensive *The Very Best Of* hits collection, their first new material in almost a decade. It also received a DVD single release, featuring several stereo-caressing stereo and 5.1 multichannel mixes.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 69; UK 69

NO MORE CLOUDY DAYS

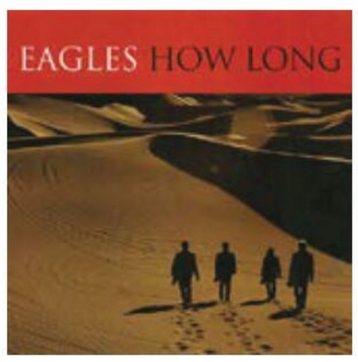
EAGLES RECORDING COMPANY II, 2005

Two years before it would appear on *Long Road Out Of Eden*, Frey's sprightly burst of sunshine-after-the-rain romance found a release around the double live DVD *Farewell 1 Tour: Live From Melbourne*, filmed at the Rod Laver Arena in November 2004. Frey's optimism stretched to the live arena too, admitting in the DVD notes that the title bore an "implication that Farewell 2 will follow soon."

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US – ; UK –

HOW LONG

LOST HIGHWAY, 2007

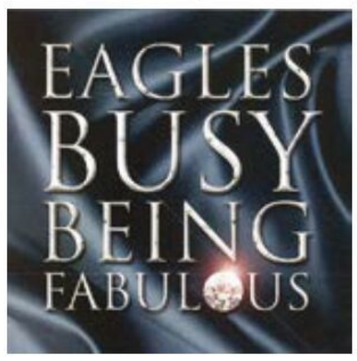


The *Long Road...* campaign launched in earnest with "How Long", a song embedded in Eagles lore. A driving, rootsy Souther number, he'd originally released it on his 1972 album *John David Souther* and it had been a mainstay of Eagles shows during their early tours. Finally recording it for the last album, it won the band their first Grammy since 1979.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US 101; UK 110

BUSY BEING FABULOUS

LOST HIGHWAY, 2008

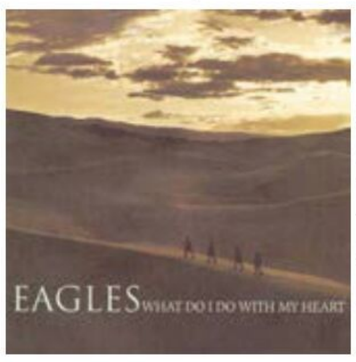


The pitfalls of the rich and famous: Henley and Frey's slick and soulful saunter "Busy Being Fabulous" concerned the tribulations of marrying a glamorous society girl with little more than high-living on her mind. The video, set at just such a party, is worth a gander, particularly for Joe Walsh's turn as a security guard with a pickpocket monkey sidekick.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US – ; UK –

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY HEART

LOST HIGHWAY, 2008

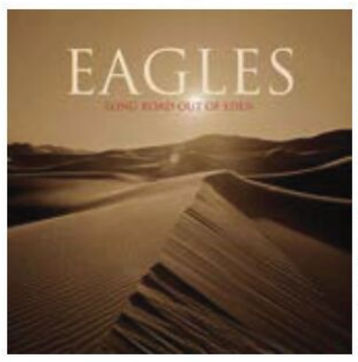


Everything all right at home? More marital strife played out on *Long Road Out Of Eden*'s impassioned third single, as both Frey and Henley contemplated the desolate aftermath of a collapsing relationship.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US – ; UK -

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE

LOST HIGHWAY, 2009



At least fans couldn't read any autobiographical trauma into the final Eagles single – this mid-paced AOR heartbreaker was a Paul Carrack composition, previously recorded for his 2008 album *I Know That Name* with Henley and Schmit on backing vocals.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: US – ; UK –

RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 8, 1994

HELL FREEZES OVER

On a cold yet phenomenally lucrative day in Hell, the Eagles end their "14-year vacation" for an MTV special, live/studio album and mammoth tour. The flight, however, remains bumpy. BY NIGEL WILLIAMSON

IN the end the only thing that could freeze the burning fires of hell was money – and plenty of it.

By 1993 the Eagles had been out of the game for more than a dozen years and, in the age of grunge, their 1970s canyon-rock seemed about as relevant as a raincoat in the Mojave Desert. Glenn Frey had enjoyed a couple of hits in the 1980s with songs for the soundtracks of *Miami Vice* and *Beverly Hills Cop*, but his most recent solo album hadn't even cracked the *Billboard* Top 100. Joe Walsh was wrecking his career with drink and drug addictions and his post-Eagles solo albums had bombed.

Don Felder had sunk into obscurity, paying the bills as a session man for hire on albums by the Bee Gees, Diana Ross and Barbra Streisand. Timothy B Schmit had been reduced to touring with Toto and Jimmy Buffet and singing backing vocals for Sheena Easton. The only one still flying high was Don Henley, whose 1989 multi-platinum album *The End Of The Innocence* had sold more than the combined tally of all the other solo releases by those who had flown the Eagles' eyrie.

According to Henley, Irving Azoff, the Eagles' rapaciously hardball manager, had been unsuccessfully trying to put the group back together since the day they had broken up. In desperation at the continued grounding of his most lucrative asset, he commissioned *Common Thread: The Songs Of The Eagles*, an album of songs from the group's back catalogue covered in mainstream Nashville style by hat acts such as Travis Tritt, Clint Black and Alan Jackson and sequined country queens Suzy Bogguss, Lorrie Morgan and Trish Yearwood among others.

Released in 1993 – the same year as Nirvana's *In Utero* and Pearl Jam's *Vs* – *Common Thread* sold three million copies in six months and not only went to No 1 in the country chart but crossed over to No 3 on the mainstream *Billboard* pop chart. Its sales were helped by the full *Long Run* lineup of the Eagles agreeing to appear in a video for Tritt's version of "Take It Easy", although none of them had actually played on the recording.

Suddenly, something approaching Eagles-mania was back. In February 1994, after *Common Thread* had gone platinum, Azoff persuaded Henley, Frey and Walsh to play a benefit concert in Aspen, Colorado, where the fledgling Eagles had woodshedded during their first gigs in an après-ski bar 22 years earlier.

There was no longer any question that they had to get back together, Azoff argued

He also invited Henley and Frey to lunch, where he put to them not so much an artistic proposal as a business plan. There was no longer any question that they had to get back together, he argued. Their music had been proved to stand the test of time and the fights and arguments were long enough ago for them to put aside their differences and prove that the Eagles really were the greatest rock band of all time – and, crucially, at the same time could make themselves the richest.

It was a hard sell but the numbers Azoff put in front of them made it an easy one. Henley and Frey left the lunch having agreed to work with each other again and immediately called Schmit and Felder, whose faltering careers made their agreement a no-brainer. Meanwhile, Walsh was given an ultimatum to clean up and agreed to go into rehab.

Frey, who had objected strongly to previous attempts by Azoff to organise a reunion on the grounds that it would be nothing more than a "lost youth and greed tour", now had to put a different spin on the idea of the Eagles ▶

EAGLES

hell freezes over

Artistic renewal and cold calculation: (l–r) Joe Walsh, Timothy B Schmit, Don Henley, Don Felder, Glenn Frey, 1994

flying in tight formation again. It really wasn't about the dollar signs, he insisted. Shooting the video with Tritt had reminded them "how much we genuinely had liked each other and how much fun we'd had". Whether it is ever a good idea to get back with your exes once trust has been destroyed was an inconvenient question which was not addressed.

Less than three months later on April 25 and 26, 1994 at the Warner Brothers sound stage in Hollywood and before an enthusiastic audience of competition winners and others invited to the session by MTV, the Eagles performed their first live shows together since their final meltdown on stage in Long Beach, California, in July 1980.

Henley penned "Get Over It", which he described as "the new band's theme song"

"For the record, we never broke up, we just took a 14-year vacation," Frey announced with more than a liberal dose of disingenuity, as they took their place, spread out across the front of stage on five high stools, acoustic guitars around their necks and plaid and flannel shirts on their backs.

MTV taped the shows for future broadcast and after Henley's infamous claim that Hades would need to turn to permafrost before they got back together, there was only one possible title they could give the project, as they rose phoenix-like from the ashes of what has gone down in Eagles lore as the 'Long Night in Wrong Beach'.

To counter sneers that the reunion was nothing more than a cynical exercise in rebuilding their bank balances and in order to give the reunion "legitimacy", Frey and Henley also undertook to write new material to augment their classic hits. Four new songs were unveiled in the MTV shows, although when the *Hell Freezes Over* album was released seven months later in November 1994 the live versions had been replaced by studio cuts.

Henley came up with "Get Over It", which he described as "the new band's theme song". A hard rocker with some stinging slide guitar from Walsh, musically the song sounded like an older and wiser sequel to "Life In The Fast Lane" and there were lyrical echoes, too. "*Call the doctor, I think I'm gonna crash*", Henley had sung back then. By the time of "Get Over It", post-traumatic stress had set in with "*You haven't been the same since you had your little crash*". It was easy enough to read the song as a commentary on the feuds that had torn the Eagles apart and Felder reinforced the interpretation. "Everybody had gotten over it," he insisted.

Yet as the MTV shows developed into a full-blown tour, it soon became evident that Henley and Frey, as the band's two hurricane force egos, had unfortunately not quite gotten over it. "It felt like an old pair of shoes that were comfortable yet a few nails were sticking through the soles," Henley admitted to Marc Eliot, author of the 1998 biography *To The Limit: The Untold Story Of The Eagles*. "The animosities, the jealousies, hurt and resentment were still there. Glenn and I started to have some competitive issues again."

Nor were the problems over with Felder, who would subsequently be fired in 2001 after he had questioned the power structure within the group and,

EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

in particular, the division of the Eagles' financial pie. He sued for wrongful termination and breach of contract and his lawyers claimed in a court deposition that the atmosphere of the reunion from the outset had been dominated by "constant threats that if Felder did not agree with Henley and Frey, Felder would be 'thrown out' of the band".

The case was eventually settled out of court in 2007. It gave an added irony to one of Henley's more mordant lines in "Get Over It" in which he sung "*Kill all the lawyers, let's kill 'em tonight*".

The other three new songs were all ballads. Frey contributed the pleasant but undistinguished "The Girl From Yesterday" and Henley the more atmospheric "Learn To Be Still", while the fourth of the new songs, "Love Will Keep Us Alive", was not written by the band at all but by Jim Capaldi and Paul Carrack. It was suggested, and then sung with aching tenderness, by Schmit, who was close friends with the writers and in the late 1980s had toyed with joining a band with them under the working name of the Malibu Male Choir.

Having made his debut on *The Long Run*, there had been little time for Schmit to make much impact on the Eagles' sound before the break-up, but the reunion found him coming into his own, not only with his sublime harmony singing but for his soft-spoken and calming influence.

THE *Hell Freezes Over* album opened with the quartet of new studio-recorded songs followed by 11 performances from the MTV shows, sequenced differently from how they had been played live and heavily overdubbed and remixed in Henley's customary pursuit of perfection.

The DVD restored the real-time sequence of the concerts, which had opened with "Hotel California". Given an extended opening overture of layered acoustic guitars and congas, there's a real frisson when Henley's vocal finally begins the song's journey down that dark desert highway, still wondering whether he's in heaven or hell.

"Tequila Sunrise" followed, even mellower than the original with some lovely mandolin from Felder. By the time they came to the *Hotel California* triptych of "Pretty Maids All In A Row", "Wasted Time" and "The Last Resort", the Burbank Philharmonic Orchestra had joined the stage to add epic texture to the melodrama.

The strings lend a majestic grandeur to "Desperado", too, although the best of the six orchestrated numbers is arguably "New York Minute" from Henley's *The End Of The Innocence*. During rehearsals for the song Henley had complained that the orchestra were "playing like trained people" (which, of course, is exactly what they were). "It's meant to be the blues, man," he had instructed the conductor in frustration. As seasoned orchestral players they were sufficiently well trained to transcend the notes on their charts and to capture the mood Henley desired. The track ended up sounding like something Gershwin might have arranged if he'd been operating in the rock'n'roll age.

The choice of material excluded anything written or even co-written by original members Bernie Leadon and Randy Meisner. The latter had called Azoff when he heard about the reunion and asked to be involved. Not only was he snubbed but he believed the exclusion of songs such as "Take It To The Limit" on which he had a writing credit was a deliberately vindictive decision to ensure he did not benefit financially. "You'd think that you would be mentioned if you helped with six of the albums. I found it unfair, petty and insensitive," he complained.

One could understand why he felt miffed as *Hell Freezes Over* went on to shift more than nine million copies, while the in-concert DVD racked up almost another million. The video release differed substantially from the audio CD and in some ways holds together better as a whole, in that it includes the live takes of the four new songs rather than the hybrid mix of live and studio cuts heard on the album. It also contained two additional acoustic songs from the MTV performance.

"Help Me Through The Night" found Walsh reprising a song he had first recorded on his 1974 pre-Eagles solo album *So What* and was dispensable enough. Why "The Heart Of The Matter" from *The End Of The Innocence* was omitted from the CD was harder to fathom. It's a magnificently intense performance with one of Henley's most impassioned blue-eyed soul vocals, and its theme of forgiveness seemed particularly apposite given the Eagles' troubled narrative.

A month after the MTV special was recorded, the Eagles embarked on one of the most lucrative tours in history. There was a lot of harrumphing about the ticket prices, which were the highest ever charged for a rock concert at the time. Yet demand far exceeded supply and scalpers were able to charge those who had missed out four or five times the face value. Playing some 160 shows across the world over the next two years, the Eagles set box office records at nearly every stop.

Yet as luxurious as *Hell Freezes Over* sounded in its glossy, pristine perfection, Frey's original objection to a reunion never quite went away. In a way, the tour was indeed a homage to "lost youth"– although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with baby-boomer nostalgia. As for the "greed", the *Hell Freezes Over* album, video and tour netted the Eagles some 75 million dollars in pre-tax earnings. Just as Azoff had promised over lunch in Aspen, they had become the richest band in the world.

SLEEVE NOTES HELL FREEZES OVER

1 Get Over It ★★★
2 Love Will Keep Us Alive ★★★★
3 The Girl From Yesterday ★★★
4 Learn To Be Still ★★★★
5 Tequila Sunrise ★★★★
6 Hotel California ★★★★★
7 Wasted Time ★★★★★
8 Pretty Maids All In A Row ★★★
9 I Can't Tell You Why ★★★★
10 New York Minute ★★★★★
11 The Last Resort ★★★★★
12 Take It Easy ★★★★
13 In The City ★★★
14 Life In The Fast Lane ★★★
15 Desperado ★★★★

LABEL: Geffen
PRODUCED BY: The Eagles, Elliot Scheiner, Rob Jacobs and Stan Lynch
RECORDED AT: Warner Studios, Burbank, California (live tracks); The Village Recorder, Los Angeles (studio tracks)
PERSONNEL: Don Henley (drums, acoustic guitar, percussion, vocals), Timothy B Schmit (bass guitar, vocals), Glenn Frey (electric and acoustic guitar, piano, keyboards, vocals), Don Felder (electric guitar, acoustic guitar, pedal steel guitar, mandolin, vocals), Joe Walsh (electric, acoustic, and slide guitar, organ, vocals)
ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL: John Corey (piano), Scott Crago (percussion, drums), Timothy Drury (keyboards), Stan Lynch (percussion), Jay Oliver (keyboards), Paulinho Da Costa (percussion), Gary Grimm (percussion), Brian Matthews (Theremin), Al Garth (trumpet on "New York Minute"), Burbank Philharmonic Orchestra (tracks 7–11, 15)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 18; US 1

RELEASED: OCTOBER 30, 2007

LONG ROAD OUT OF EDEN

A "fragile entity" of alphas ekes out a seventh, tackling politics, media, "cultural junk" and their own turbulent history.

BY TERRY STAUNTON

THE rigours and demands of touring have done for many a group, the goldfish-bowl dynamic of being forced into close proximity to one another for an extended period of time a recipe for friction. Paradoxically, however, having once been its casualties, the reunited Eagles found the road the most workable environment.

The box office potential of their undimmed A-list status in an era of rich rewards for "heritage" acts meant budgets were large enough to accommodate a level of luxury that would minimise the possibility of confrontational showdowns – when hell did freeze over for the Eagles, it was in the best accommodation. Lengthy global outings in 1994 and 2001 were undertaken with the individual players more often than not travelling in isolation to each other and even staying in different hotels. For vast stretches of the tours they needed only meet face to face during the two hours or so they were required to share a stage. When it came to making new music, though, the claustrophobic nature of recording under the same roof presented a different set of hurdles to overcome.

Sessions for what would become *Long Road Out Of Eden* began shortly after the 2001 tour, but it would be another six years before the album was ready to take to market; six years of stop-start activity that would involve a total of eight producers (including Henley and bandmates Glenn Frey, Joe Walsh and Timothy B Schmit) and seven studios. It also followed the departure (for a second time) of guitarist Don Felder, and a greater role for guitarist Steuart Smith, who filled his shoes, and co-wrote several tracks – although was never named as a "proper" Eagle.

Differences of opinion were constant within what Schmit would later call the "fragile entity" of the band, at one point leading to a 12-month break that some observers felt might become permanent. Walsh often found himself in the role of peacemaker, happy to be so for old friends he credits with helping him wrestle his addictions. "They needed a commitment from me and said they didn't want to [*reform*] unless I was sober, so heading out on the road was a great incentive for me to put my life back together again," he told this writer in 2012.

> **"In the studio, I did my best to lighten things up a little"**
> **JOE WALSH**

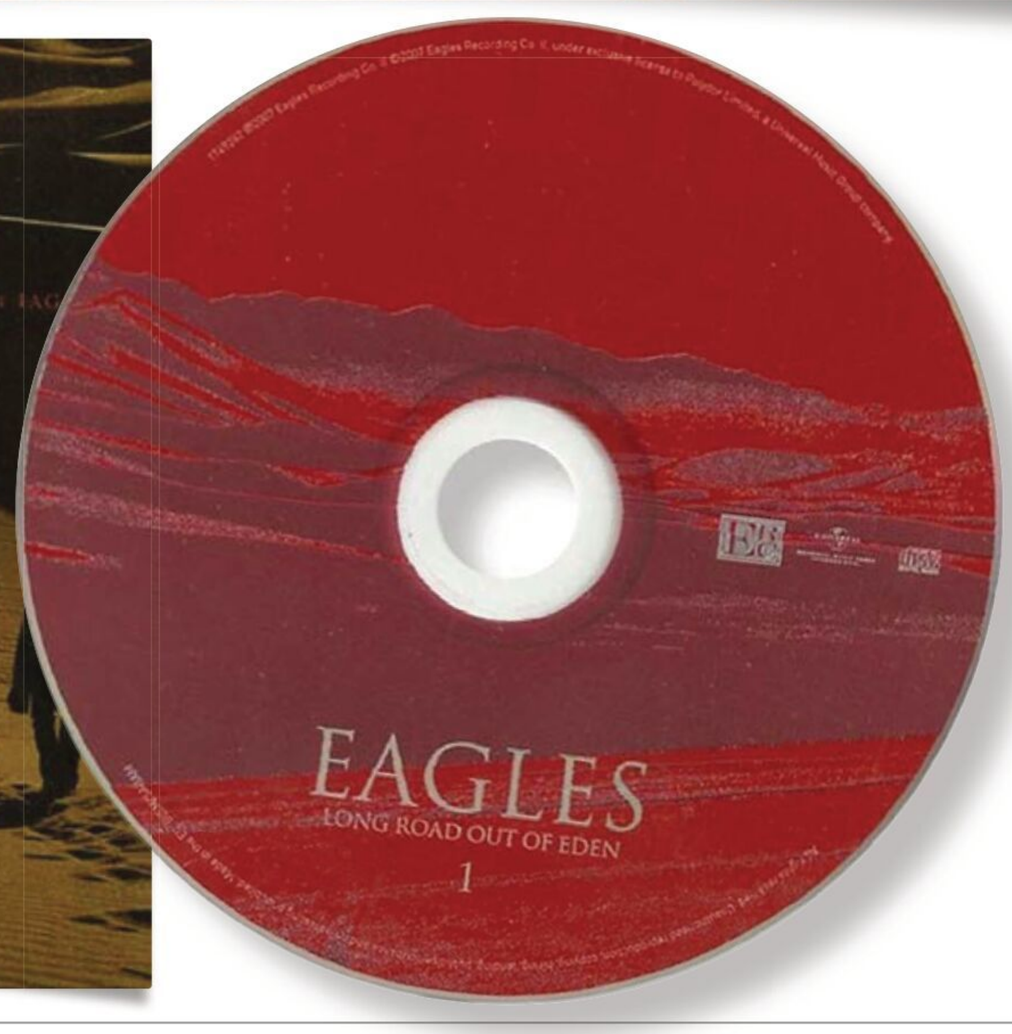
"Subsequently, when we were in the studio I did my best to lighten things up a little – it tends to get very serious otherwise. There are four extremely alpha personalities in the band, if I can put it that way; there's a tension there that's always been part of our creative process, but something about the Eagles is bigger than any of us individually."

The curtain rises on *Long Road Out Of Eden* in, literally, harmonious fashion, with the largely a cappella two minutes of "No More Walks In The Wood", inspired by the Walden Woods Project, a charity founded by Henley in 1990 to lobby for the conservation of natural habitat, and incorporating lines by US poet John Hollander. From there, the album diverts to what sounds suspiciously like a run of songs instigated by individual members' agendas but gathered together under an Eagles umbrella for convenience's sake.

Frey is first to step up to the plate for a song that has its roots in the band's formative years; the breezy, singalong "How Long" intermittently featured in early-'70s live sets, having appeared on the eponymous debut album of its writer and frequent Eagles collaborator JD Souther. Henley also ▶

EAGLES
LONG ROAD OUT OF EDEN

DISC ONE
1 NO MORE WALKS IN THE WOOD 2:00
2 HOW LONG 3:15
3 BUSY BEING FABULOUS 4:21
4 WHAT DO I DO WITH MY HEART 3:55
5 GUILTY OF THE CRIME 3:44
6 I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE 4:21
7 WAITING IN THE WEEDS 7:47
8 NO MORE CLOUDY DAYS 4:04
9 FAST COMPANY 4:01
10 DO SOMETHING 5:13
11 YOU ARE NOT ALONE 2:22
DISC TWO
1 LONG ROAD OUT OF EDEN 10:17
2 I DREAMED THERE WAS NO WAR 1:38
3 SOMEBODY 4:10
4 FRAIL GRASP ON THE BIG PICTURE 5:47
5 LAST GOOD TIME IN TOWN 7:08
6 I LOVE TO WATCH A WOMAN DANCE 3:16
7 BUSINESS AS USUAL 5:32
8 CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE 3:42
9 IT'S YOUR WORLD NOW 4:20
10 HOLE IN THE WORLD 4:17*
*UK BONUS TRACK
eaglesband.com
6 02517 49406 0


EAGLES
LONG ROAD OUT OF EDEN
1

references the past for his opening turn at the centre mic on "Busy Being Fabulous", ostensibly a romantic breakup ode but with a title and lyrical asides he hit upon when solo success brought him into the orbit of superficial fame seekers ("*What do you do when you come up empty?/What do you do when the party ends?*").

"I consider myself a writer and a recording artist, but because the beginning of my solo career coincided with MTV's arrival I found myself, reluctantly and for the first time, having to be an actor as well," he said in 2012. "The pressure when you film a promotional clip is to play a part, and while I shouldn't complain because I won MTV awards myself [*for "The Boys Of Summer" and "The End Of The Innocence"*], the shallowness of that world holds nothing for me. It was alien to everything I wanted to be."

Both "How Long" and "Busy Being Fabulous" were lifted as singles, perhaps unsurprisingly, given the pecking order within the band – Frey and Henley have long been candid about being on more lucrative deals than either Walsh or Schmit since reforming in '94. Nonetheless, the members arguably perceived in some quarters as second-stringers are soon afforded their own moments in the sun.

Walsh's friendship with Frankie Miller stretches back to the '70s when the former's James Gang appeared on the same bills as the Glaswegian-born singer-songwriter, and he first cut a version of Miller's rough-hewn, blue-eyed R&B stomper "Guilty Of The Crime" in '94 for the soundtrack to the spinoff TV series of *Robocop*. It was originally intended to form part of an album the two men were planning as a new group to also feature pianist Nicky Hopkins and former King Crimson drummer Ian Wallace, until a brain haemorrhage all but ended Miller's career.

Three weeks after ...*Eden* was unveiled, Henley was declaring it their swansong

The significance of the song's revival by Walsh for ...*Eden* was brought home when the Eagles played a pre-release fan club showcase at the modest-sized Indigo club within the complex that houses the O2 Arena in London. A frail Miller was in attendance, and Walsh called for a round of applause for his old pal, pleased that writing royalties for a track on an album practically guaranteed to sell millions would be a huge boost to Miller's ongoing rehabilitation.

By coincidence, one of Miller's earliest backing musicians, keyboard player and future Mike + The Mechanics singer Paul Carrack, was also due a healthy payday, courtesy of Schmit's lead vocal on a cover of the ballad "I Don't Want To Hear Any More" – a song Carrack had previously recorded himself, with Schmit and Henley on harmonies. Taking into account the addition of East Coast songwriter Larry John McNally's "I Love To Watch A Woman Dance", it could be argued the sourcing of outside material hints at a difficult state of affairs creatively, in terms of amassing enough songs for the double album Henley and Frey in particular felt the band's full-blown "comeback" warranted.

Which also underlines the importance of live guitarist Steuart Smith to the Eagles family. Smith was welcomed into the fold in place of Don Felder in 2001, primarily to replicate the guitarist's lead parts in concert, most notably the instrumental duels with Walsh on the likes of "Hotel California" and "Life In The Fast Lane". That he receives co-writing credits on five ...*Eden* tracks (three more than either Walsh or Schmit), however, is evidence of his value to the group – not least on one of the album's centrepieces, the nigh-on eight-minute slowburn rumination "Waiting In The Weeds".

Henley, for many the lyricist in the band with the greatest talent for nuance and grasp of metaphor, paints a picture of parallels – of a man patiently waiting for a love rival to fail, and of the Eagles themselves preparing to fly again: "*You know it didn't go down in flames/There was no final scene, no frozen frame/I just watched it slowly fade away*". "On the surface it's a love song, but it's also about this band," he revealed to *Billboard*. "We've just been waiting for some of this bad music to die down, for certain trends to go away, so that we can get out there again. We are a band that knows how to bide its time."

Railing against "bad music", alongside what he identifies as the "cultural junk" of cable news and internet clickbait, forms part of the second magnum opus on ...*Eden*, its 10-minute title track. Here Henley is writing on a much wider canvas, employing biblical references to inform his anger at US foreign policy at the height of the Bush administration's war on terror and the dubious wisdom of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There's a tangible venom to the lines "*Weaving down the American highway/Through the litter and the wreckage and the cultural junk/Bloated with entitlement, loaded on propaganda/Now we're driving dazed and drunk*". Its

CRITICS' VERDICTS

"Their first studio album in 28 years, *Long Road Out Of Eden* spreads 20 tracks over two CDs and 90 minutes and amply demonstrates how this plan continues to serve them well. The elements that made the Eagles America's biggest band – hooky, articulate songcraft, impeccable lead vocals and stunningly tight harmonies – have certainly not atrophied over the long hiatus."
BUD SCOPPA, UNCUT, DECEMBER 2007

ANDREW MACPHERSON/PRESS

The Eagles at Rotterdam Ahoy, April 1/3, 2008, the second stop on their globe-traversing Long Road Out Of Eden Tour

imagery of a nation in crisis is less aligned to anything in the Eagles' back catalogue than it is the observational protest of Henley's solo high-water marks "The Boys Of Summer" or "Johnny Can't Read".

Less ambitious but just as antsy, the Southern soul and faux funk of "Frail Grasp On The Big Picture" airs Henley's disdain for ill-informed barflies and blinkered followers of religion, while laying part of the blame at the door of an ineffectual media. Wearily, he suggests "*Even if one of them was to read the newspaper cover to cover/That ain't what's going on/Journalism's dead and gone*".

Frey tends to be less direct when addressing issues, but urges active political and social engagement on "It's Your World Now", although the song started out as a simple message to his own children (he came relatively late to parenthood, becoming a father for the first time in his forties). "*Be a part of something good, leave something good behind*", he sings, to a Tex-Mex rhythm, an elegant vocal that recalls the Roy Orbison-like grandeur he brought to "New Kid In Town". The song's full lyric was posted on the Eagles' official website to accompany the announcement of his death in 2016.

Beyond the front-page news of making fresh music, the Eagles hit headlines for the manner in which the album was sold. Manager Irving Azoff ignored eight-figure overtures from several majors, and instead set up a deal where, for an initial 12 months, the record was available in North America only via the band's website, or through just two retail chains, Walmart and Sam's Club. What's known in industry parlance as an account-exclusive release has since become more commonplace, but ...*Eden* was the first to make a big enough impact to top the charts.

"I am in the business of selling records, and I want to be in a place where we have the opportunity to sell the most records," Frey told *Billboard*. "It's also nice that Walmart pays us a very lucrative royalty, a royalty that no record company could come close to matching. That's because we are not a loss leader at Walmart; if the Eagles put out a record at Warners or any other major label, we've got to pay for all of the bad acts they sign."

There were royalties aplenty on the album's path to worldwide sales in excess of eight million, while the band's return to recorded work also garnered five Grammy nominations and two wins (Best Country Vocal Performance by a duo or group for "How Long", Best Pop Instrumental Performance for Frey's understated, 97-second "I Dreamed There Was No War"). Eagles past and present would take to the Grammy stage again in 2016 for a tribute to Frey, performing their debut hit "Take It Easy" with the song's co-writer, Jackson Browne.

Although continuing as a touring unit, with a string of US and European dates in 2022, further album triumphs have long seemed unlikely, increasingly so since the death of creative lynchpin Frey. But as early as just three weeks after ...*Eden* was unveiled to the public Henley was already declaring it their swansong, obliquely suggesting it was an experience no-one was in a hurry to repeat.

"I can't sit here and tell you for certain there will never be another," he told CNN, "but we've got 20 songs on this album, and we got a lot of things off our chest. I don't know if anybody's going to want to do another one."

SLEEVE NOTES LONG ROAD OUT OF EDEN

1 No More Walks In The Wood ★★★★
2 How Long ★★★★
3 Busy Being Fabulous ★★★★
4 What Do I Do With My Heart? ★★★
5 Guilty Of The Crime ★★★
6 I Don't Want To Hear Any More ★★★
7 Waiting In The Weeds ★★★★★
8 No More Cloudy Days ★★★
9 Fast Company ★★★
10 Do Something ★★★★
11 You Are Not Alone ★★★
12 Long Road Out Of Eden ★★★★★
13 I Dreamed There Was No War ★★★
14 Somebody ★★★
15 Frail Grasp Of The Big Picture ★★★★
16 Last Good Time In Town ★★★
17 I Love To Watch A Woman Dance ★★★
18 Business As Usual ★★★★
19 Centre Of The Universe ★★★
20 It's Your World Now ★★★★

LABEL: Polydor (UK)/Eagles Recording Company/Lost Highway (US)
PRODUCED BY: Eagles, Steuart Smith, Richard Davis, Scott Crago, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: The Doghouse, LA; Samhain Sound, Malibu; O'Henry Studios, Burbank; Henson Studios, Hollywood; Mooselodge, Calabasas; The Panhandle House, Denton; Luminous Sound, Dallas
PERSONNEL: Glenn Frey (vocals, guitar, bass, keyboards), Don Henley (vocals, drums, guitar), Joe Walsh (vocals, guitar, keyboards), Timothy B Schmit (vocals, bass), Steuart Smith (guitar, keyboards, mandolin), Scott Crago (drums), Richard Davis (keyboards), Michael Thompson (keyboards, accordion, trombone), Will Hollis (keyboards), Bill Armstrong (trumpet), Al Garth (saxophone, violin), Christ Mostert, Greg Smith (saxophone), Lenny Castro, Luis Conte (percussion)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 1

ROB VERHORST/GETTY

RELEASED: 1982-2012

GLENN FREY SOLO

Hollywood (finally) calls and the heat is on for solo Frey. Hits and flops in a range of roles make for an edge-of-seat career.

BY JASON ANDERSON

WITH MTV making an artist's visual brand more important than ever before, the '80s posed a daunting challenge to the men emerging from the wreckage of the Eagles. After all, dressing up as outlaws for the cover of *Desperado* was just about the sum total of the care they ever gave to their image. They otherwise stuck with denim and T-shirts in photos and on stage, their shaggy hair and moustaches making the members look interchangeable. If anything, the Eagles grew more indifferent to matters of appearance as their fame and wealth swelled. In his *Rolling Stone* cover story in 1979, Charles M Young described the band as an "anonymous monolith", a phrase that struck a chord with fans who couldn't pick Don Felder out of a police lineup.

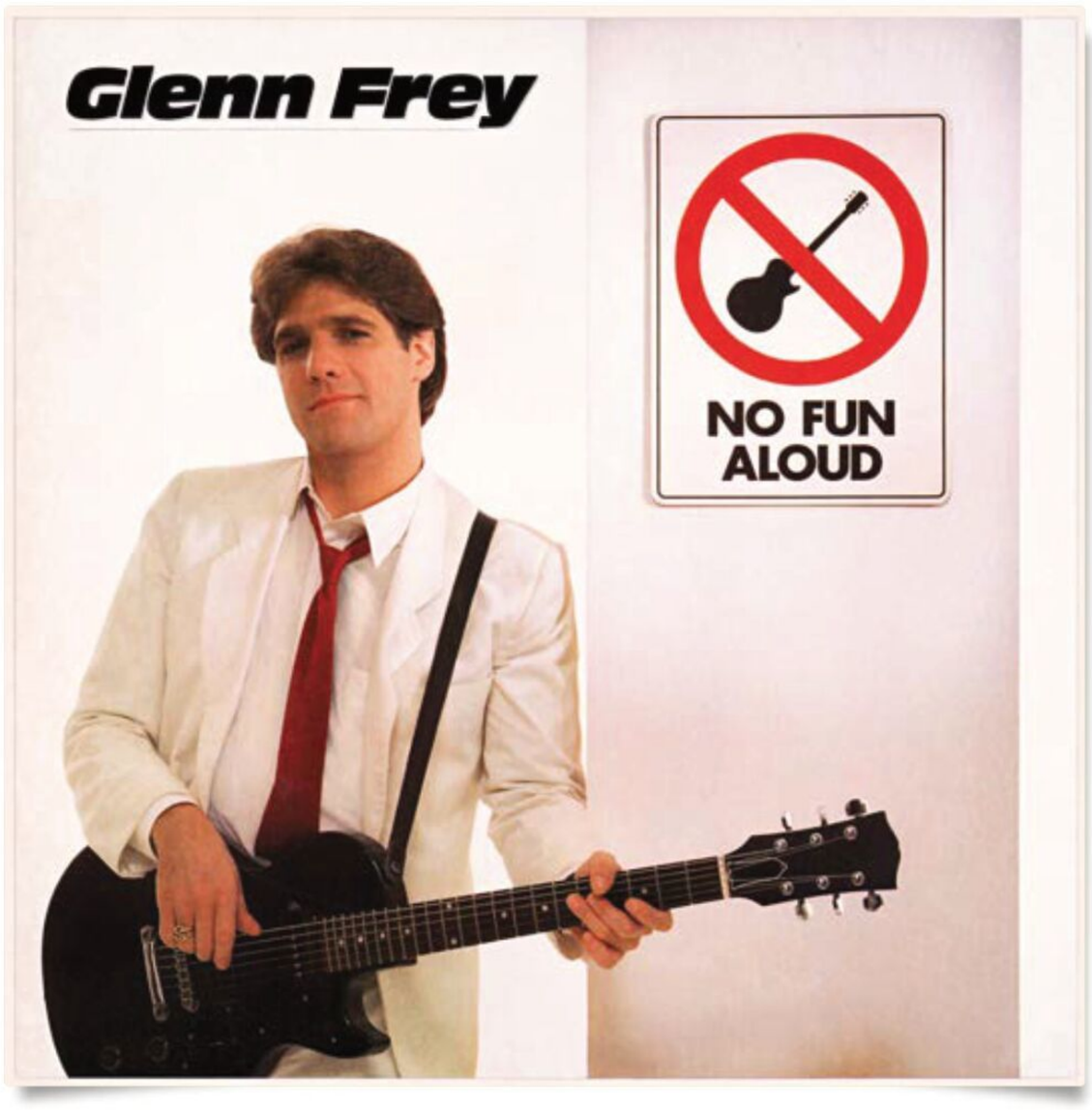
While his former partner Don Henley didn't even look up at the camera for the cover of his first post-Eagles album a few months later, Glenn Frey was far more enthused to play the game for his reintroduction to the marketplace. With his moustache shorn and his hair tidied, Frey is downright style-forward in his white sports jacket and red not-so-skinny tie on the cover of 1982's *No Fun Aloud*. Squint hard enough and he could almost be Elvis Costello's Californian cousin.

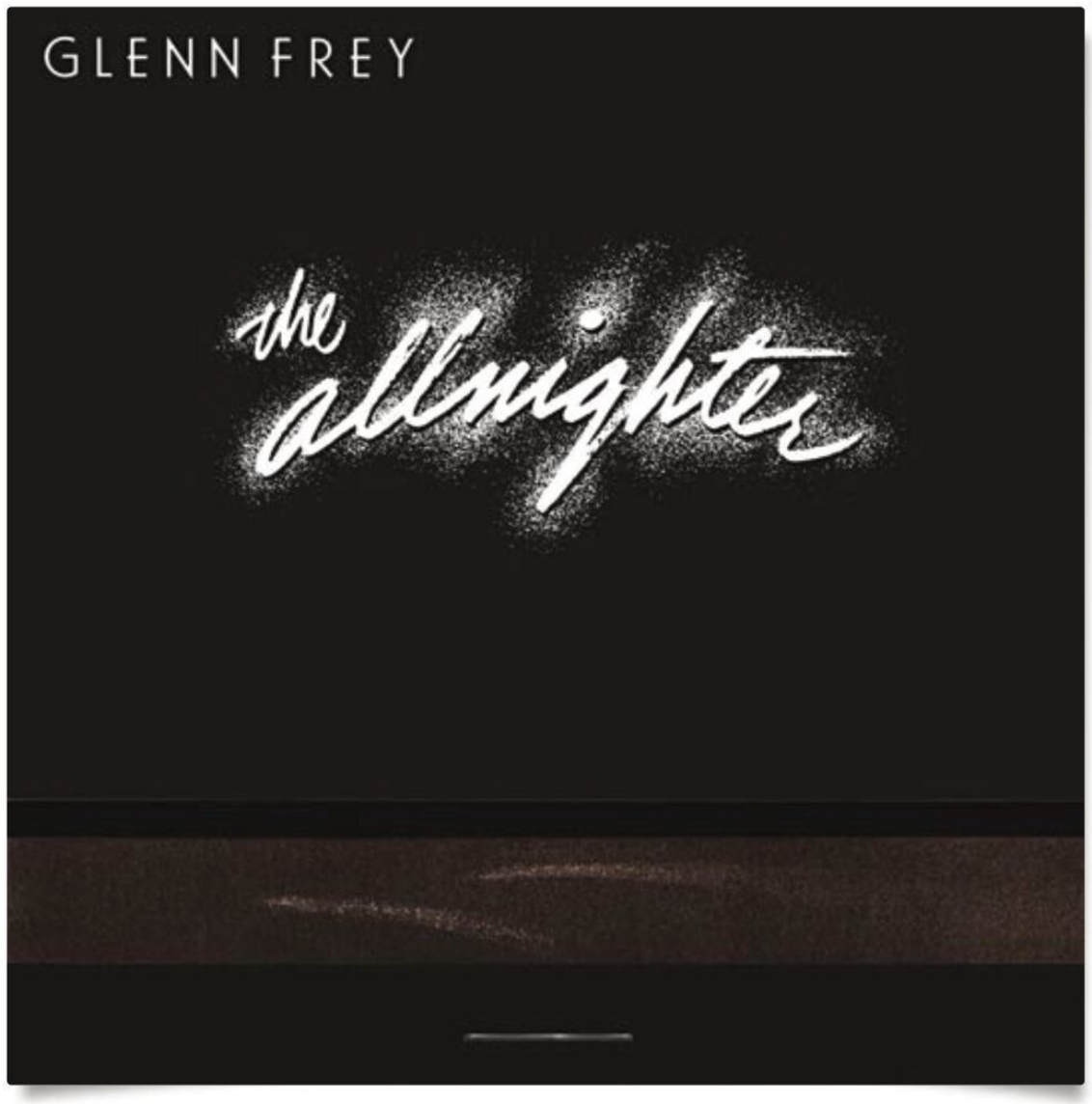
Potentially more surprising than Frey's initial stab at a makeover was his understanding of another key lesson of the MTV era, which was that the ability to change up your look was more important than having your image stay put. Two years later, he was the hunk in the sharp suit and dark sunglasses in the video for "Sexy Girl". For "Smugglers' Blues", he was the stubble-faced anti-hero trying to stay a step ahead of cops and killers alike. When not appearing as an actor in film and TV, he was swaggering and smouldering all over video channels in hits like "You Belong To The City". In his efforts to define himself as an ex-Eagle, Frey discovered he loved the camera. Better yet, the camera loved him back.

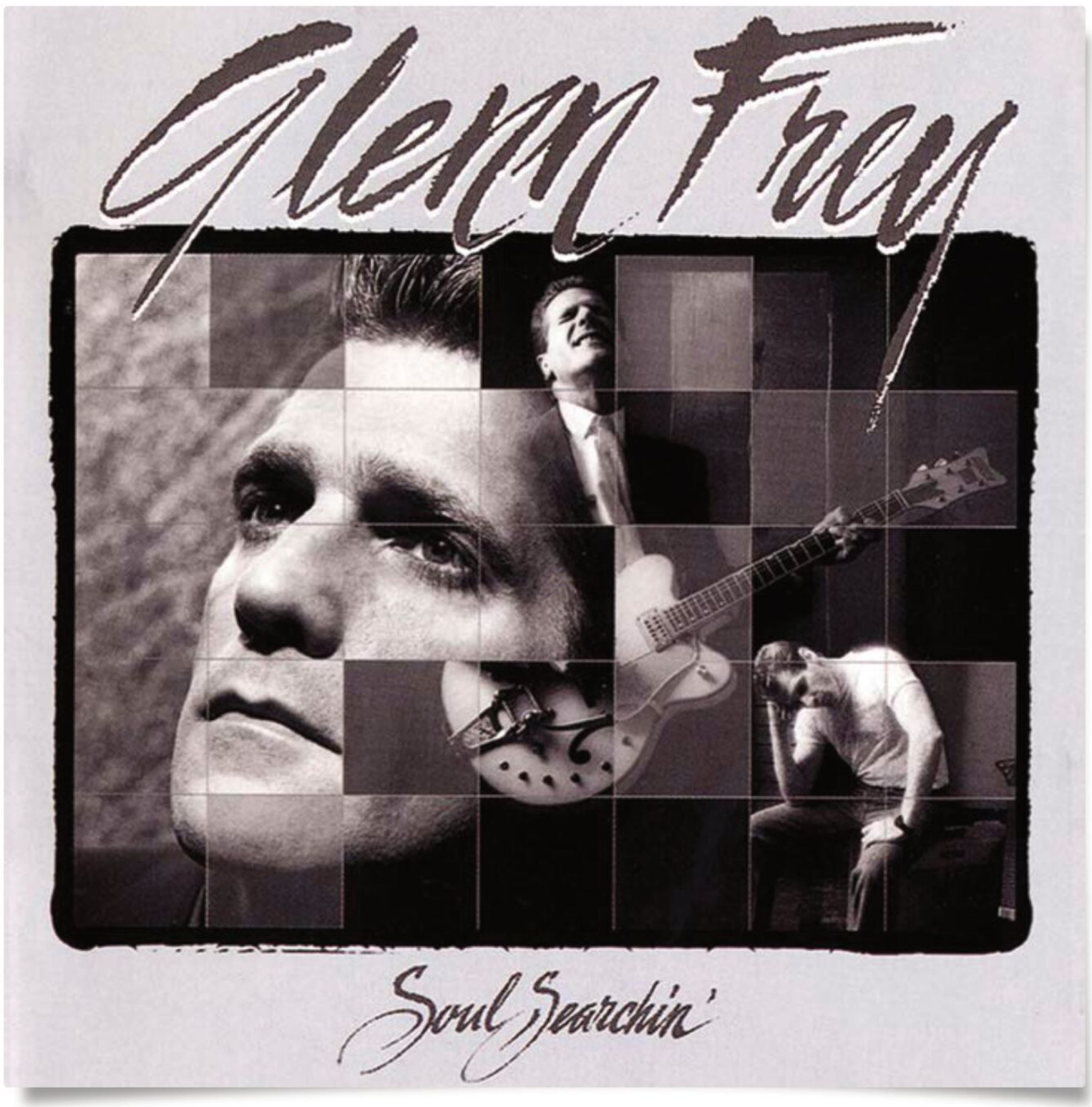
In his efforts to define himself as an ex-Eagle, Frey discovered he loved the camera

But as was the case for so much of the era's hit music, the songs that filled the most successful phase of Frey's solo career could seem skimpy without the accompanying flash. Just as the music for the songs he contributed to *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Ghostbusters II* needed the additional punch provided by action montages, the lyrics in songs such as "Smuggler's Blues" sounded like dialogue for movies that had yet to be made. The mix of earthy sincerity and ladies-man suaveness that had made him the Eagles' heartthrob now seemed more calculated. Likewise, in the wake of this fleeting period of MTV stardom, Frey came to seem increasingly disengaged from his musical career, seemingly content to return every few years with another proficient but unremarkable collection of high-gloss rock, pop, and R&B before the stream tapered off during the Eagles' second phase. Four years before his death in 2016, there was time for one last image overhaul, but by then little attention was paid to his work outside the band that had made him famous.

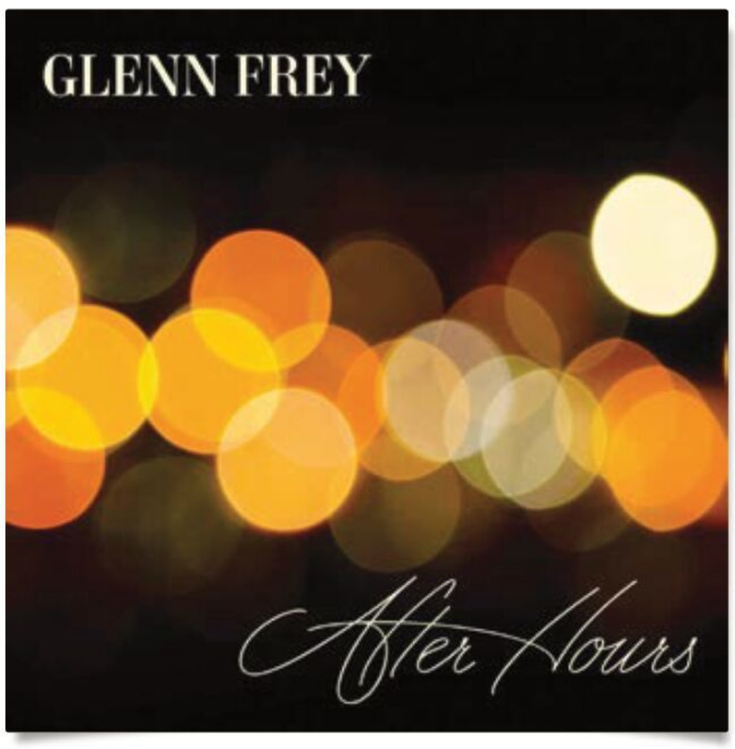
Expectations were considerably higher for Frey's first outing since the Eagles' split in 1980, what with *The Long Run* still chugging along on its way to eight million units sold and *Their Greatest Hits* on its way into the record books. Having grown accustomed to writing with a partner, he turned to Jack Tempchin, a veteran on the band's roster of collaborators and song suppliers and a ▶


Glenn Frey
NO FUN
ALOUD


GLENN FREY
the allnighter


Glenn Frey
Soul Searchin'

Strange
Weather
Glenn Frey


GLENN FREY
After Hours

CRITICS' VERDICTS

NO FUN ALOUD
"The title is what passes for a witty pun on the West Coast; the music wouldn't pass muster in an American International teen flick. Resolutely 'personal', deeply 'conceptual', it's all exquisitely bland, tarted up here and there with tasteful horns and strings."
MONTY SMITH, NME, JULY 31, 1982

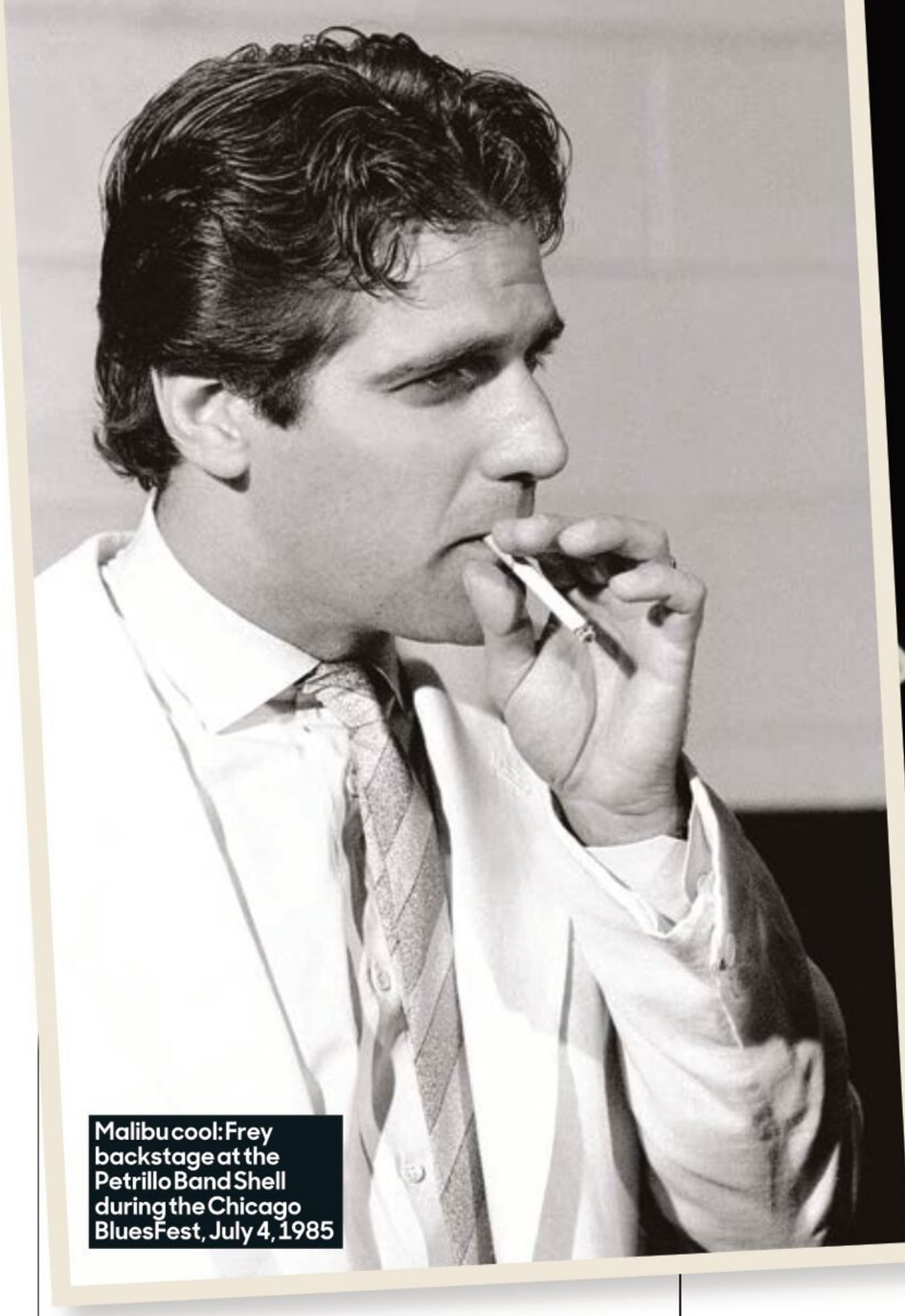
STRANGE WEATHER
"If you think that his desperado days are behind him, then check out 'Love In The 21st Century' and swoon along to that almost John Fogerty muscle which he punches into his playing."
EDWIN POUNCEY, NME, AUGUST 22, 1992

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

friend since they were young songwriters on the hustle together. Years before they met in LA, Tempchin wrote an early version of "Peaceful Easy Feeling" during his time playing folk clubs in San Diego. After he gave it to Frey to try out with his new band, it became the Eagles' third hit. Tempchin would stay in the band's orbit, later landing another co-write with "Already Gone" on *On The Border* and several more in the reunion era.

Of the 10 songs on *No Fun Aloud*, Frey and Tempchin wrote five, including the amiable opener "I Found Somebody". Frey got an assist from another old friend in Bob Seger for "That Girl". Along with the Frey solo composition "All Those Lies", none of these three qualify as deviations from the tried-and-true, but they're certainly more pleasing than Frey's strained efforts to get some distance from his past self with the cringe-inducing "Partytown" and a creaky rendition of Huey "Piano" Smith's "Sea Cruise". While Mink DeVille and Robert Plant's Honeydrippers proved it wasn't unhip for a rocker of the '80s to rely on such potentially musty reference points, the blend of bar-band boogie and horn-heavy R&B on much of *No Fun Aloud* still felt badly dated. (Ironically, given the album's underwhelming performance, Huey Lewis & The News would soon make a mint off the same formula.)

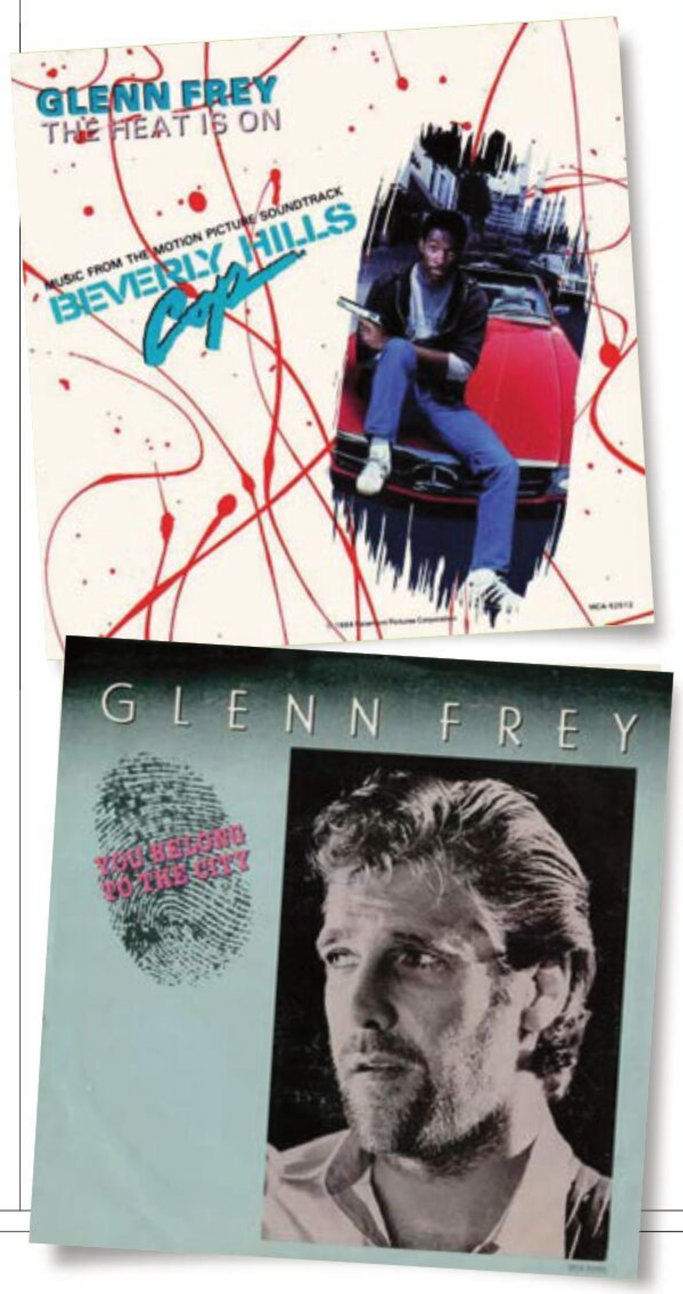
Frey was on surer footing with the album's most enduring song, "The One You Love", a sax-laden ballad that drew a more convincing line between his sultriest Eagles hits and the soundtrack smashes to come. "The One You Love" also previewed the smooth-operator persona that came to the fore on *The Allnighter* in 1984, on which he and collaborators like Tempchin and Muscle Shoals vet Barry Beckett apply a high sheen to songs steeped in influences of Southern soul ("Somebody Else"), countrypolitan ("Lovers Moon"), and even electro-funk ("Living In Darkness"). Little did Frey know that one of the videos made for the album would lead to a sideline career as an actor. Thankfully, it wasn't the clip for "Sexy Girl", a regrettable example of both the flagrant sexism of the MTV era and Frey's penchant for smarminess. It was the one for "Smuggler's Blues", a slide-guitar-driven rocker that transformed Frey into a cocaine cowboy who knew all about the dirty money that tied the cartels to the crooked politicians. Upon seeing the video, Michael Mann invited Frey to play a variation of the



Malibu cool: Frey backstage at the Petrillo Band Shell during the Chicago BluesFest, July 4, 1985

character on *Miami Vice*. Cast in the role of Jimmy Cole, a guitar-playing pilot with a shady clientele, Frey held his own opposite his Armani-clad co-stars. All of a sudden, Frey was Hollywood's new kid in town – so what if he'd been there for years?

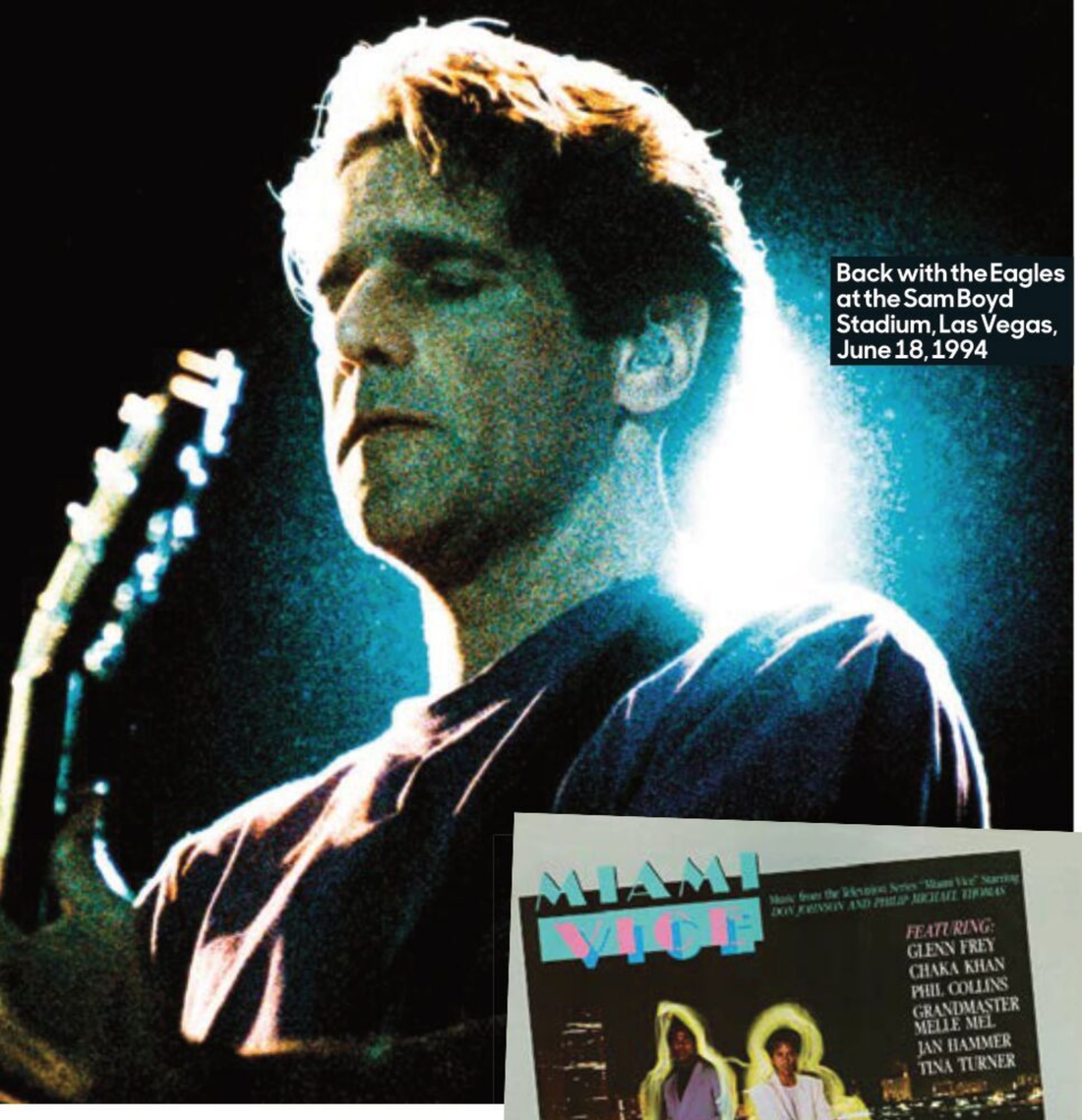
The movie biz soon knocked with another opportunity. A few months after he was invited to an early screening of the Eddie Murphy action comedy *Beverly Hills Cop*, Frey spent two days in the studio to supply vocals and guitar for an uptempo song written by the film's scorer Harold Faltermeyer and Keith Forsey. Released along with the movie in December of 1984, "The Heat Is On" became one of Frey's biggest hits inside or outside the Eagles, reaching



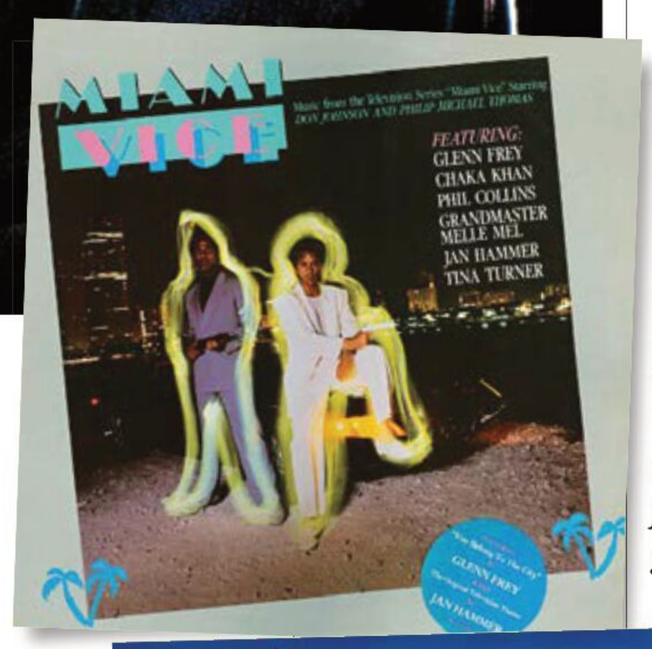
No 2 in the US. An irresistible, sax-powered piece of bluster, it was custom-built to accompany the high-tension mayhem on screen. It also landed Frey on the first of two blockbuster soundtracks in 1985. The other was for *Miami Vice*, which featured two Frey/Tempchin contributions in "Smuggler's Blues" and "You Belong To The City". Created for another episode, the latter was the apotheosis of a particularly overblown strain of '80s rock (again, it was all about that sax solo), and was as thrilling as it was cheesy. It too went to No 2.

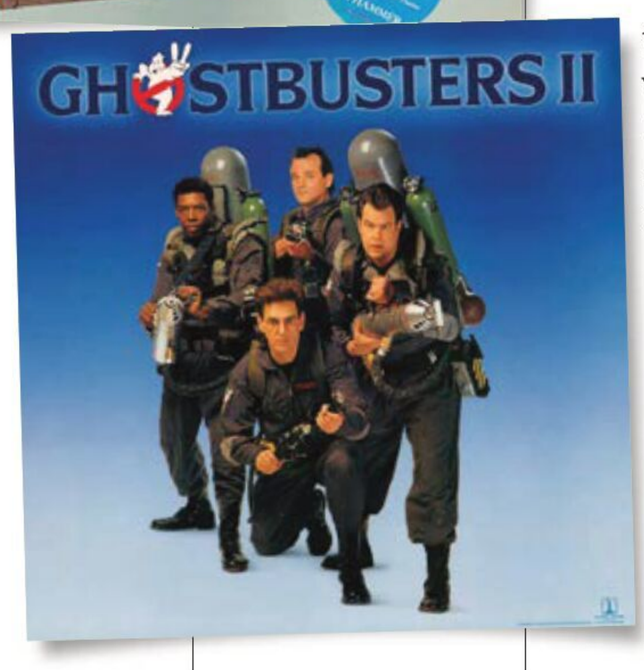
There was nothing anonymous about Frey any more. Instead, he was on the verge of being a superstar in several realms at once. He thought he'd found the movie that would establish him as an A-lister in *Let's Get Harry*, an action movie about blue-collar friends rescuing a kidnapped associate in Colombia. The chance to co-star with Robert Duvall and Gary Busey looked like a can't-miss proposition. Alas, the end result was dire enough to be unceremoniously buried by the studio in 1986. Around the same time, Frey passed up another song he was offered for the *Beverly Hills Cop* franchise. Instead, "Shakedown" went to Seger, a generous gift since it became his pal's first and only US No 1 single in 1987.

Frey could've used some of that heat when he returned in 1988 with *Soul Searchin'*. The eight new songs by Frey and Tempchin suggest that as songwriting partners go, they were not apt to challenge each other. Pillowy soul-pop numbers like "Some Kind Of Blue" make for passable fare, as does "True Love", the more Stax-styled number that became a minor hit. But the airless, synth-heavy production smothers any sense of humanity in the ballads and removes any distinguishing features from the rest. Even with the



Back with the Eagles at the Sam Boyd Stadium, Las Vegas, June 18, 1994





novelty of featuring a small-scale Eagles reunion with Timothy B Schmit – who contributes backing vocals on two songs – this music could've been produced by anyone.

In a time when Neil Young mocked his fellow heroes of the '60s and '70s for cosying up to corporate America, Frey didn't betray any qualms about seeming like a sellout. Instead, he arguably attained his greatest visibility at the decade's end shilling for a chain of fitness clubs. One infamous ad paired a picture of his Eagles self (captioned with the words "Hard Rock") and his fit-at-40 counterpart with dumb-bell in hand ("Rock Hard").

Along with a recurring role on the TV mob drama *Wiseguy*, his Hollywood endeavours included helping to fill out the soundtrack of *Ghostbusters II* with a lite funk-pop song called "Flip City" in 1989. Initially released on the soundtrack for *Thelma & Louise* in 1991, "Part Of Me, Part Of You" was a more distinctive outing for its synthesis of Bon Jovi-style heartland rock and Eagles harmonies. It also appeared on Frey's fourth solo album, 1992's *Strange Weather*. Though the songs' sound was familiar, Frey and Tempchin's lyrics shifted away from the usual topic of witchy and bewitching women in favour of the more contemplative tone of Henley's solo writing. The most overtly political song here is "He Took Advantage (Blues For Ronald Reagan)", a pointed critique of a favourite target of the rock elite even four years after he left office. "*It's a lowdown dirty shame he doesn't have to pay*", Frey laments, "*for being so deceitful and treating us this way*". On a more social note, a few decades before dating apps arrived Frey groused about the modern mores of meeting and mating in "Love In The 21st Century". As he snipes, "*I don't know her, she don't know me/She's my video date, she's my destiny*". Despite (or because of) his dyspeptic mood, *Strange Weather* was his liveliest album since *No Fun Aloud*.

It's also easy to discern the warming of long-frosty relationships with his former bandmates amid the country-ish boogie of "Before The Ship Goes Down". As he sings, "*Let's fill up the wagon, let's go downtown/Let's find all our old buddies before the ship goes down*".

The airless, synth-heavy production smothers any sense of humanity

When *Strange Weather* failed to chart in the US, Frey might've wondered if being back in the Eagles was his only option if he still wanted a career in music. His hopes for screen stardom also sputtered out when *South Of Sunset* – a slick detective series centred around him – was cancelled after only one episode in 1993. Frey's troubles continued when MCA filed suit against him in 1994 over his move to end their contract. (The *Solo Collection* compilation in 1995 marked the end of his tenure.)

With the resumption of his Eagles duties in 1994 came a seemingly permanent hiatus for Frey as a solo recording artist. He signalled a different intention in 1998 with the formation of Mission Records, an indie label founded by Frey and his lawyer Peter Lopez with the intention of releasing music by artists including himself. "It's time for me to get off the golf course," Frey joked to *Billboard*. Yet the label quietly folded after one album by Max Carl and the Big Dance, a project by another longtime buddy.

Then, two decades after *Strange Weather*, Frey returned in a guise very different from all of the ones that came before. In a move that evoked comparisons with Rod Stewart's career-reviving journey into the Great American Songbook, Frey recast himself as an old-school variety of jazz crooner for 2012's *After Hours*. Though a few performances reveal the limitations of his voice in regards to pitch and expressiveness, Frey's shift into a lower register reaps considerable rewards throughout. While the string-laden renditions of "For Sentimental Reasons" and "The Shadow Of Your Smile" make for highly satisfying schmaltz, more idiosyncratic choices like The Beach Boys' "Caroline No" and Randy Newman's "Same Girl" elicit some of the finest and most surprising performances in his career. Sadly, Frey's late-career embrace of supper-club jazz proved to be more of a one-night stand than a committed relationship. Yet as an unintended swansong, the music here is a potent reminder of just how silky smooth Frey could be when he truly put his mind to it. He looked the part and he sounded it, too.

SLEEVE NOTES GLENN FREY SOLO

NO FUN ALOUD ★★★
LABEL: Asylum/Elektra
RELEASED: 1982
PRODUCED BY: Glenn Frey, Allan Blazek, Jim Ed Norman
RECORDED AT: Bayshore Recording Studio, Miami; Muscle Shoals, Sheffield, Alabama; Rudy Records, Los Angeles; Wilder Bros Studios, Los Angeles
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 32

THE ALLNIGHTER ★★★
LABEL: MCA
RELEASED: 1984
PRODUCED BY: Glenn Frey, Allan Blazek, Barry Beckett
RECORDED AT: Wilder Bros Studios, Los Angeles; Muscle Shoals, Sheffield, Alabama; Ocean Way, Los Angeles; Caribou Ranch, Nederland, Colorado
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 31; US 22

SOUL SEARCHIN' ★★
LABEL: MCA
RELEASED: 1988
PRODUCED BY: Glenn Frey, Elliot Scheiner
RECORDED AT: Fool On The Hill, Los Angeles; Schnee Studios, LA; Studio 55, LA; Ocean Way, LA; Cherokee, LA, Capitol, Hollywood; Hit Factory, New York; Automated Sound, New York; Muscle Shoals, Sheffield, Alabama; The Sandbox, Connecticut
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 36

STRANGE WEATHER ★★★
LABEL: MCA
RELEASED: 1992
PRODUCED BY: Glenn Frey, Elliot Scheiner, Don Was
RECORDED AT: Bill Schnee Studios, Cherokee Studios and Soundcastle (Hollywood, CA); Mad Dog Ranch (Crawford, CO)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US –

AFTER HOURS ★★★★
LABEL: Universal
RELEASED: 2012
PRODUCED BY: Richard FW Davis, Michael Thompson, Glenn Frey
RECORDED AT: The Doghouse, LA; Schnee Studios, North Hollywood
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 92; US 116

NIELS VANIPEREN/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: 1982–2015

DON HENLEY SOLO

With a little help from noted friends, one Eagle soars above all others. Merging personal rumination with political ire, Don Henley continues to mine the rich seams of discontent beneath mainstream Americana.

BY GRAEME THOMSON

IF Don Henley historically regarded the Eagles as a "benevolent dictatorship" dominated by the band's two principal songwriters, then his subsequent solo career effectively settled the matter of which was the more potent force within the band.

As a solo act, Henley earns top dog status over Glenn Frey partly because he found a way of convincingly being himself without straying too far from the musical and thematic foundations established within the Eagles. Never much concerned with appearing likeable, Henley has at least always seemed committed to a clear vision of both himself and America, a dedication which lends everything he does the added oomph of authenticity.

His solo work straddles his dual identities as drummer and singer-songwriter, combining groove-based blues-rock with downbeat, country-infused balladry and the odd pop song. Lyrically his themes are similarly defined, bouncing between the politicised anger of the (comfortably) enraged liberal and poetic, often pained contemplation of what critic Robert Christgau once described, perfectly, as a penchant for "candid self-involvement". Now and again, it all coalesces beautifully, capturing the rage, emptiness and regret of a generation's squandered promise and soured idealism.

Comprised of tracks that are mostly co-written, featuring multiple producers and cast lists starrier and longer than the average Grammy seating plan, Henley's five solo studio records are anything but spontaneous diversions. When the Eagles split acrimoniously in 1980, he wasted little time getting off the mark. "Leather And Lace", an acoustic duet with then-girlfriend Stevie Nicks which first appeared on her album *Bella Donna*, was a hit in 1981, effectively launching Henley into his most productive solo decade.

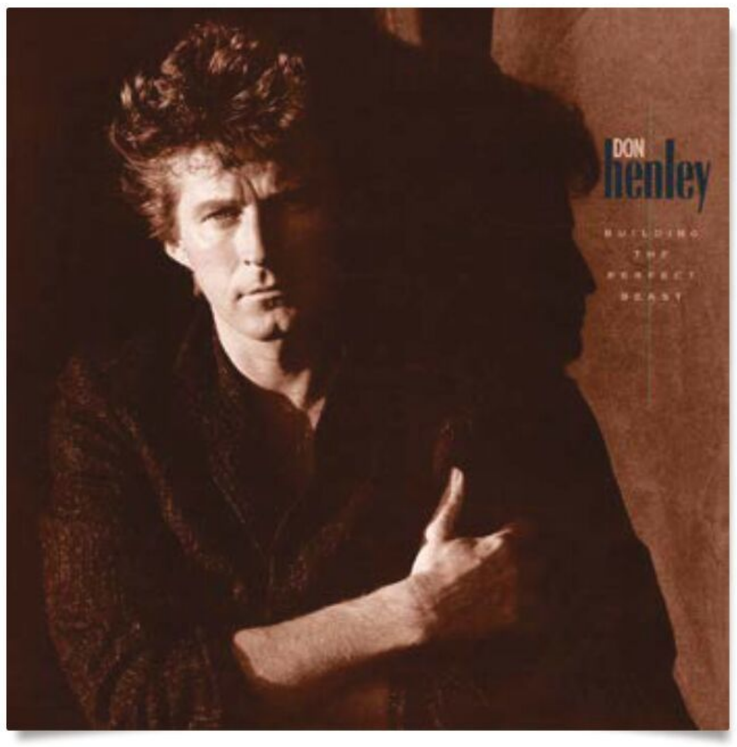
Debut album *I Can't Stand Still* followed shortly after. Sleek and contemporary, it finds him addressing familiar tropes with a new wave-aware briskness. Co-produced by Greg Ladanyi and Danny Kortchmar, who also co-writes the bulk of the songs with Henley, the sessions provided safe harbour for a host of notable musicians. A couple of ex-Eagles and one honorary member appear in the shape of Joe Walsh, Timothy B Schmit and JD Souther. Elsewhere, Warren Zevon and even Paddy Moloney, on brief Celtic instrumental "La Eile", are called upon. (The proliferation of guests and styles can be scattershot: the less said about "The Unclouded Day", a Baptist hymn rendered in a reggae style with Bill Withers on backing vocals, the better.) Bob Seger co-writes the rousing "Nobody's Business", which vies with "You Better Hang Up", a Springsteen-like tale of small-town betrayal, as the album's superior rocker.

Henley has always seemed committed to a clear vision of both himself and America

Its big single, "Dirty Laundry", doles out not one but two guitar solos: the first to Walsh, the second to Steve Lukather. Bigger and brasher than anything else on the album, with its thudding drum sound, pulsing synths and disco-rock groove, "Dirty Laundry" takes a very personal swipe at the hypocrisy of the tabloid press and degraded TV news culture. Given that Henley's ire related to the public fall-out from his 1980 charge relating to delinquency of a minor, his perch on the moral high ground feels a trifle precarious, even if the song's themes have aged depressingly well.

His gruff melancholy streak takes prominence on homesick homily "Talking To The Moon" but threatens to become overbearing on "Long ▶

DON HENLEY I CAN'T STAND STILL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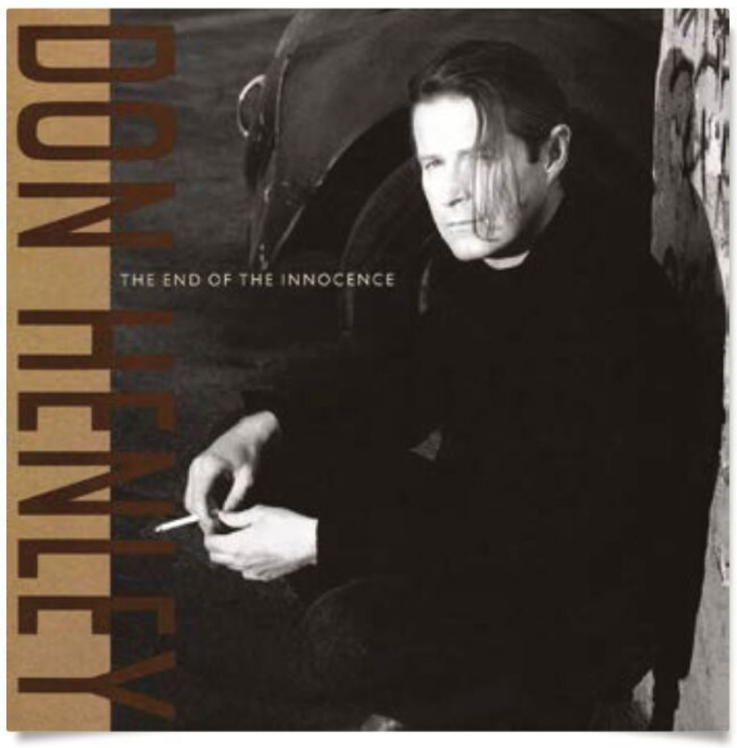
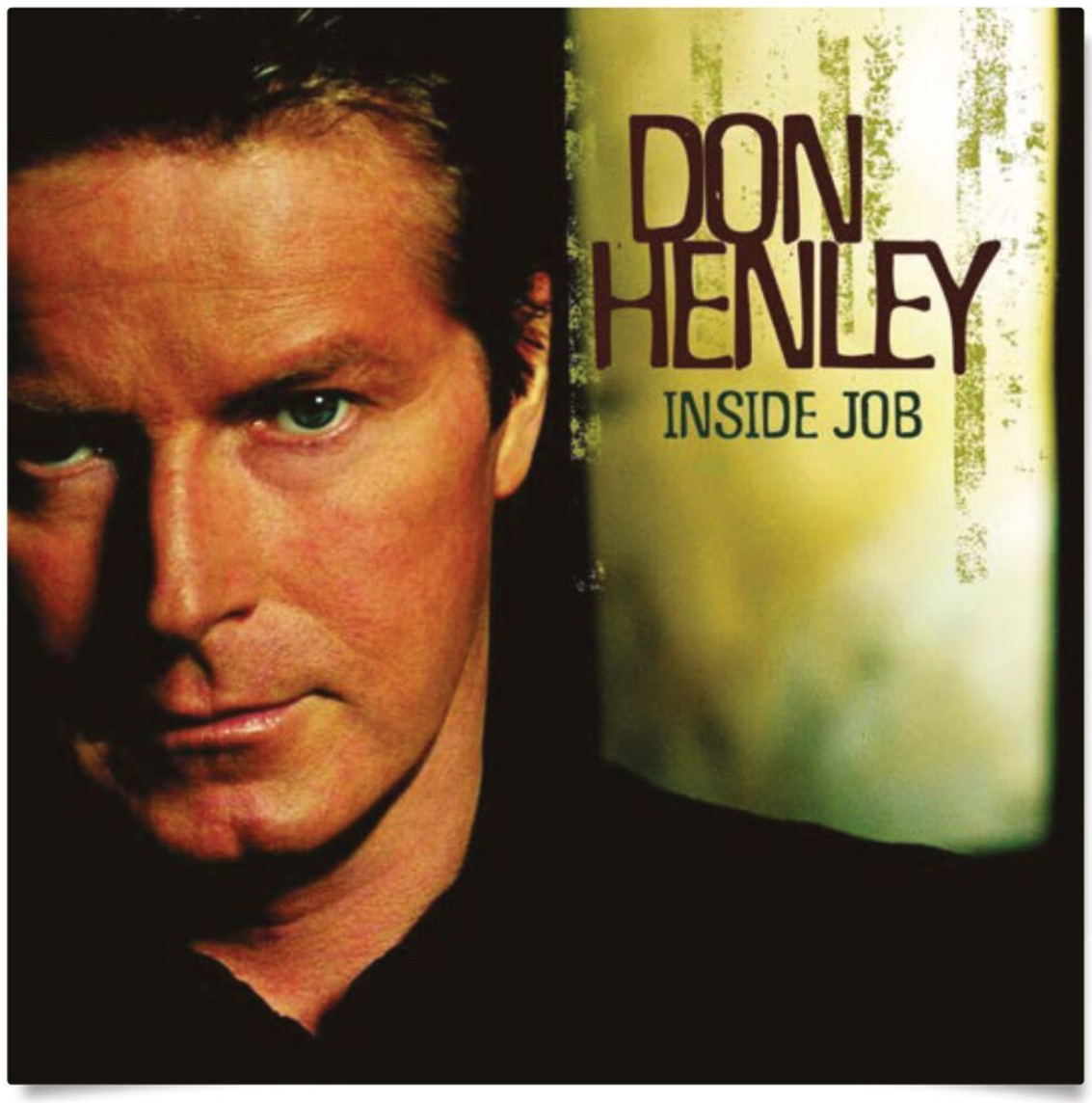

DON HENLEY
THE END OF THE INNOCENCE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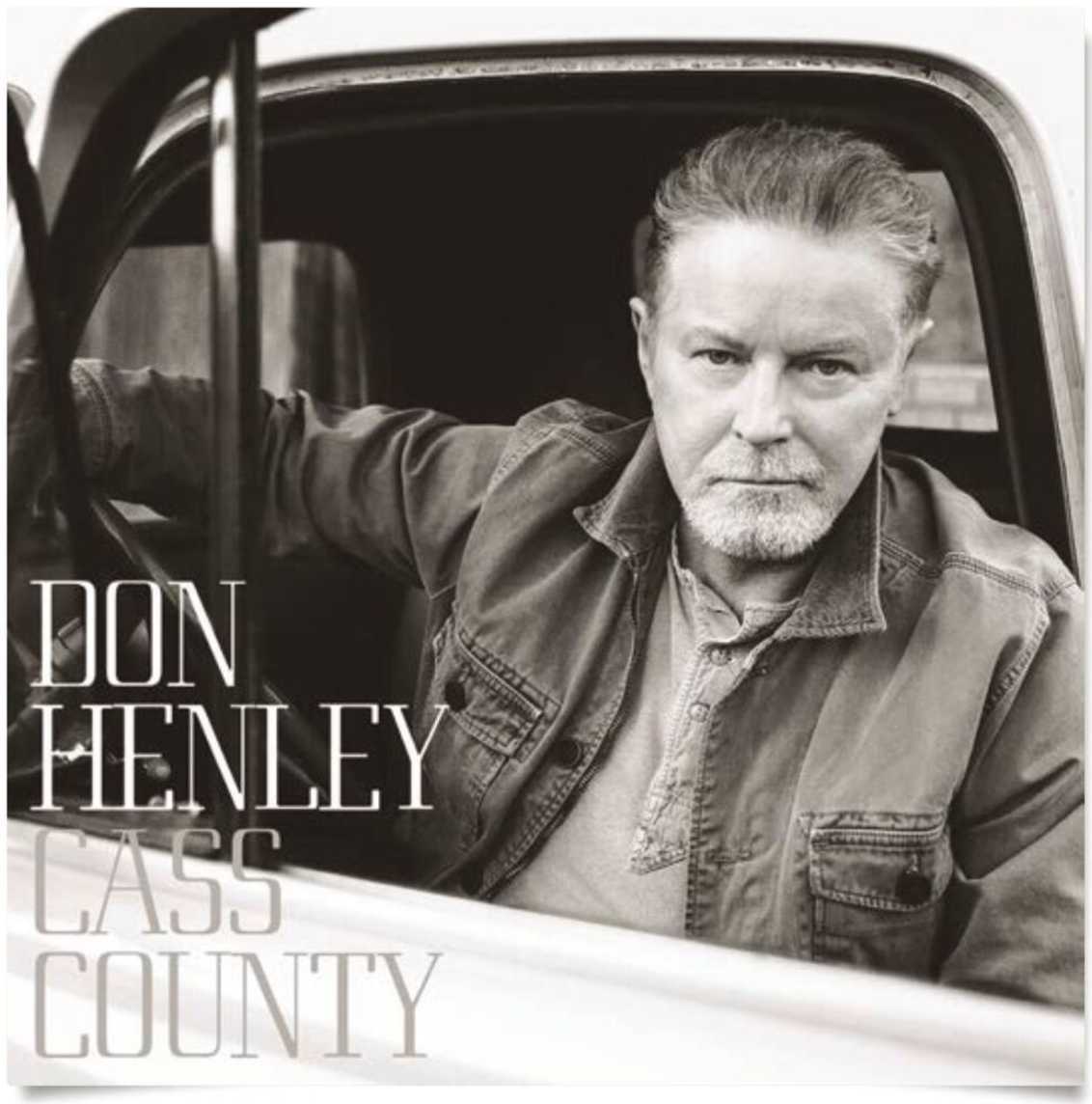
DON
HENLEY
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Way Home", a sluggish ballad of domestic disrepair: "*The heat don't work, the toaster don't work, the car don't work... this house don't work, and this dream don't work no more*". Sheesh. In contrast, "Johnny Can't Read" is much more fun than it sounds, outlining the misfortunes of an illiterate ne'er-do-well let down at every rung in the system. Henley raps out quickfire lyrics over rinky-dink '50s-inspired power pop, sounding perfectly at home in the age of "Little Red Corvette" and "Centerfold".

Two years down the line, 1984's *Building The Perfect Beast* established him as a bona fide solo star. A more streamlined affair than his debut, it's a record as ruthlessly attuned to its times as *Hotel California* was a decade before. Check out those bright "Dancing In The Dark" keys smeared all over "You Can't Make Love": the '80s have fully arrived on a record replete with drum programming, synths, sparky guitars and Pino Palladino's fretless bass, corralled into focus by Henley's heart-and-head world view. *Building The Perfect Beast* stuck around the US charts for over a year.

It kicks off with the unimpeachable "The Boys Of Summer", the apotheosis of mid-'80s MTV-softened pop-rock. Co-written with The Heartbreakers' Mike Campbell, one of four producers (and three Heartbreakers) on the record, "The Boys Of Summer" exemplifies Henley's ability to discern the dark outline of the Californian idyll. Conflating the ache of lost romantic attachment with the souring of a grander dream, the "*Dead Head sticker on a Cadillac*" symbolises a generation whose ideals have been betrayed. The nagging, insistent synth lick ushers in a mood of brooding unease before the major-key chorus – which Queen later purloined more or less wholesale for "Breakthru" – offers thrilling release. It gave Henley his biggest UK solo hit, reaching No 12 late in 1984.

Campbell's presence had the added bounty of bringing fellow Heartbreakers Benmont Tench and Stan Lynch along for the ride. Tench's ever-tasteful keyboard contributions are most evident on minor hit "Not Enough Love In The World", a solid, mid-tempo soul number which he co-wrote. He also elevates "Month Of Sundays", an otherwise heavy-handed yarn of conflicted patriotism in heartland America which earnestly lays out the hardships that would shortly lead to Farm Aid.

Elsewhere, Henley handbrake turns from the squealing rockabilly of "Man With A Mission" to "You're Not Drinking Enough", a fine tears-in-my-beer country-gospel ballad. All fretless bass and jarring chord shifts, "Sunset Grill" is a dark, synthetic take on familiar tropes, Randy Newman contributing the sleekly stylish synth arrangements, like a 1940s Big Band filtered through *Blade Runner*. The title track is an ugly, unwieldy thing, but the greasy groove of "All She Wants To Do Is Dance", the album's other big single, proves more fertile ground. Essentially ZZ Top for beginners, it shakes a superior, casually misogynistic fist at a slumbering citizenship that would rather party than engage with societal ills.

Five years passed before Henley emerged with his third album, *The End Of The Innocence*, boasting no less than six producer credits and a familiar cast of co-writers and personnel. Now in his early forties, he sounds sadder and a little wiser. Collectively these songs of divorce, regret and middle-aged angst amount to a generational reckoning, finding their optimum form of expression in plush, immaculately upholstered AOR.

These songs of divorce and regret amount to a generational reckoning

One new face on the block is Bruce Hornsby, who not only co-wrote the swirling title track but contributes his distinctive, rolling electric piano. Between its glossed sheen and tumbling melody, it is perhaps the finest expression of Henley's age-old sense of being haunted by the past and yet half in love with the ache. Flexing at recently departed president Ronald Reagan – "*this tired old man we elected king*" – the marrying of personal loss and national decline is elegantly executed. Wayne Shorter's soprano saxophone solo edges the track into Van Morrison territory and what could have been vacuous, a hymn to disillusioned bankers in shiny suits and too-neat ponytails feeling the pinch of a third divorce, instead becomes something graceful, universal and quietly moving.

"New York Minute" mines a similarly autumnal bleakness of the soul. It's an ambitiously constructed epic full of tensile drama, from its symphonic jazz opening to its minor-chord synth pads and chiming chorus. Lurking among the cast of characters negotiating the baffling gear changes of mid-life is the album's manifesto of sorts: "*You find somebody to love in this world/You better hang on tooth and nail*".

The record is characterised by big statements blaring newfound emotional maturity. "Heart Of The Matter" – co-written with Campbell and Souther – is a rancour-free farewell to a defining relationship. "The Last Worthless Evening" – chugging mid-tempo soft-rock in excelsis – is a cautionary tale of two burned lovers recovering from past love affairs, more wary now than in their younger days.

These songs proved perfect fodder for the unplugged MTV Special Henley performed to promote the record. However, *The End Of The Innocence* isn't all bruised rumination. "How Bad" is convincingly thunderous, while "I Will Not Go Quietly" lives up – or perhaps down – to its title, with Kortchmar sitting in on drums and having a ball, and Axl Rose joining in the chorus. The sparse, spookily rhythmic "Shangri-La" divines more trouble in paradise and further rude awakenings for some poor unsuspecting soul. Though otherwise a generic blues-rocker, "Gimme What You Got" rails convincingly against "*Trumped up towers/Golden showers*" and how "*a man with a briefcase can steal more than a man with a gun*", which nowadays feels now like pretty prescient stuff.

THE 11-year hiatus between solo albums three and four can largely be explained by Henley's rancorous lawsuit with Geffen and the small matter of the Eagles' unlikely reunion in 1994. When it finally arrived, 2000's *Inside Job* offered a trademark mix of socio-political catastrophising and personal reflection, mostly co-written with co-producer Stan Lynch.

Spread over 13 songs and 70 minutes, the results are heavily informed by Henley's marriage to Sharon Summerall in 1995, from the self-explanatory "For My Wedding" to the brooding "Everything Is Different Now". At times, the wiry romanticism of old curdles into sentiment. A piano ballad named for his daughter, "Annabel" begins with the cliché of a new father watching his baby sleep. The cosy count-your-blessing homilies of "My Thanksgiving" are similarly saccharine, while "Taking You Home" strays into Michael Bolton territory. "Damn It Rose", with its ghosts of "Wish You Were Here" by Pink Floyd, is simply long and dull.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

BUILDING THE PERFECT BEAST

"This actually revels in its determinist vision of human doom; a revisit to Lang's *Metropolis*... This is a supremely clever record. But, for all that, it should carry a goverment health warning."
RACHEL WILDE, NME, FEBRUARY 23, 1985

"The album is pure LA in sound and texture. Aided by old lags like Danny Kortchmar, Steve Porcaro and Lindsey Buckingham from the local mafia, not to mention keyboardsman Ben Tench and the excellent Mike Campbell from Tom Petty's Heartbreakers, Henley has ensured a seamless finish in all departments. Synths often gain the whip hand over guitars, but song structures are basically trad... However, Henley has unexpectedly made some effort to look outside his California cocoon... *Beast* is patchy but it's alive and kicking."
ADAM SWEETING, MELODY MAKER, FEBRUARY 16, 1985

Haunted by the past: Don Henley in Rome, circa 1989

LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES

Henley appearing on *MTV Unplugged* in LA, 1990, and (right) reunited with former squeeze and duet partner Stevie Nicks

"Goodbye To A River" is better, a lilting ecological anthem inspired by the novel of the same name by American writer John Graves. Elsewhere, a robustly contemporary rhythmic thrust animates funky opener "Nobody Else In The World" and "Workin' It". The former features Stevie Wonder on background vocals, while the latter's rousing litany of modern disgust includes Henley's half-decent Dylan impersonation. On the appealing snap and crackle of "Miss Ghost", he is visited by the spirits of his troubled past as Jimmie Vaughan fires out blues guitar licks.

The rather lumbering title track predicts the financial crash of 2008, but whereas in the past Henley's anger seemed honed, at times here he simply sounds angrily at odds with a changing world. "*There's a lesson to be learned from this*", he sings, "*But I don't know what it is*".

An album of country collaborations has become a default career option for many veteran artists, sometimes gratuitously so. For Henley, however, 2015's *Cass County* was a case of not only returning to his roots, but to a rich source of direct inspiration throughout his career. The Eagles' country borrowings notwithstanding, in 1976 he sang with Linda Ronstadt on "Hasten Down The Wind", while his 1981 duet with Nicks, "Leather And Lace", was originally written by her for Waylon Jennings. He has sung on hits with Trisha Yearwood and in the 2000s recorded duets with Kenny Rogers and Reba McIntire on their respective albums.

Named after the Texan district where he was raised, *Cass County* is a highly enjoyable, natural-sounding excursion. Recorded in Texas and Nashville, and using the best of the genre's session players, the tracks blend a handful of traditional country and Americana songs – "Too Far Gone", "When I Stop Dreaming", Jesse Winchester's "Brand New Tennessee Waltz" – with new originals mostly written by Henley and Lynch.

The guest list is, as ever, A-list, including turns from Alison Krauss, Vince Gill, Dolly Parton, Martina McBride, Merle Haggard, Lucinda Williams and Trisha Yearwood. The opening track, a cover of Tift Merritt's "Bramble Rose", finds Henley trading verses with Mick Jagger and Miranda Lambert. Impeccably performed and recorded, the songs sit snugly within his musical and emotional range, while that distinctive voice, weathered but still strong, is empathetic and on point. Who would have bet on Don Henley growing old gracefully?

SLEEVE NOTES DON HENLEY SOLO

I CAN'T STAND STILL ★★★★
LABEL: Asylum
RELEASED: 1982
PRODUCED BY: Don Henley, Danny Kortchmar, Greg Ladanyi
RECORDED AT: Record One, Los Angeles
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK –; US 24

BUILDING THE PERFECT BEAST ★★★★
LABEL: Geffen
RELEASED: 1984
PRODUCED BY: Don Henley, Danny Kortchmar, Greg Ladanyi, Mike Campbell
RECORDED AT: Record One, Los Angeles; Bill Schnee, Universal City; The Villa, Los Angeles
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 14; US 13

THE END OF INNOCENCE ★★★★
LABEL: Geffen
RELEASED: 1989
PRODUCED BY: Don Henley, Danny Kortchmar, Mike Campbell, John Corey, Bruce Hornsby, Stan Lynch
RECORDED AT: A&M, Los Angeles; The Complex, Los Angeles
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 17; US 8

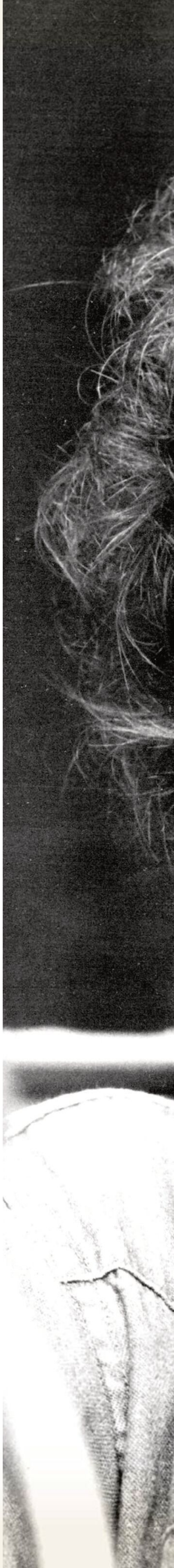
INSIDE JOB ★★★
LABEL: Warner Bros
RELEASED: 2000
PRODUCED BY: Don Henley, Stan Lynch
RECORDED AT: Record Plant, Los Angeles; Samhain Sound, Los Angeles; Royaltone, Los Angeles; Jai Winding, Los Angeles; Le Mobile, Carlsbad, California; ASC Sumet Studios, Dallas
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 25; US 7

CASS COUNTY ★★★★
LABEL: Past Masters Holdings/ Capitol
RELEASED: 2015
PRODUCED BY: Don Henley, Stan Lynch
RECORDED AT: Red Oak Studios, Dallas; Luminous Sound, Dallas; Allentown Studios, Nashville; Sound Emporium, Nashville; Blackbird Studio, Nashville; House Of Blues Studios, Nashville
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 7; US 3

JEFF KRAVITZ/GETTY; RAY MICKSHAW/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

"I'VE REACHED A POINT WHERE I WANT TO GO BACK TO MY ROOTS"

With the release of a country album, DON HENLEY is drawn into reflection on the heroes (Kenny Rogers) and villains (David Geffen) in his story. He also reminisces about the Eagles, from the music to the "substances", and the jousting with fellow perfectionists Steely Dan. "We did strive for excellence, and that's two different things," hears ANDY GILL. "There are flaws all over those Eagles records, and I could point them out to you."



TREVOR JAMES ROBERT DALLEN/FAIRFAX MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

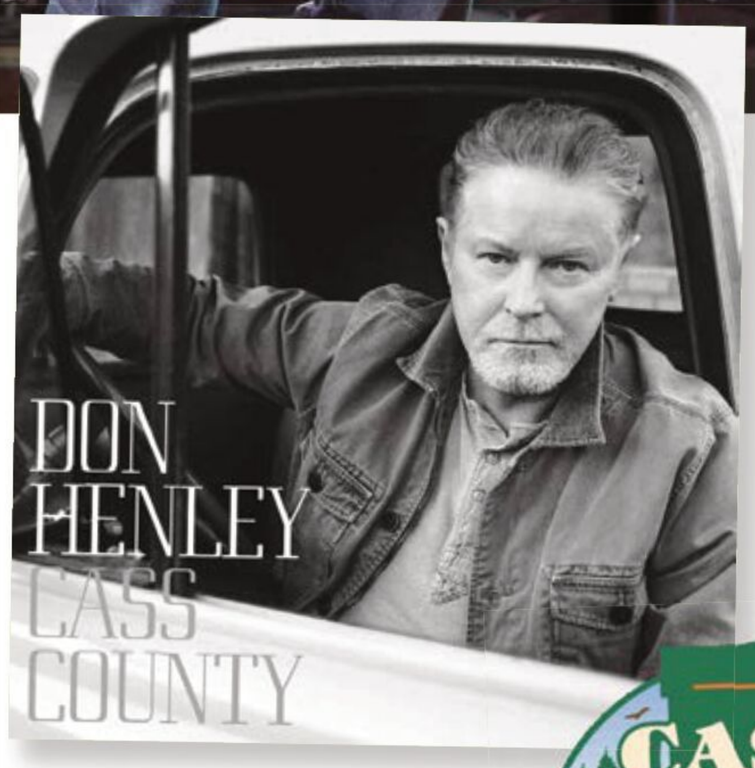
"I'm from the sticks": Don Henley circa 1976

UNCUT DECEMBER 2015

EVEN the sky is bigger in Texas, a vast blue baize liberally scattered with cotton-wool clouds; while beneath it, the flat, featureless plain extends forever, studded with slender, bulbous water towers like giant map-pins, each bearing the name of the small town it fixes to the ground.

This is the kind of landscape that Don Henley grew up in, and to which he returns on his new record, *Cass County*, a country album that reflects his rural upbringing. We're 30 or 40 miles outside Austin, passing the water-tower for Hutto, heading to Don's favourite barbecue joint, just down the road in Taylor, a fading town that seems barely there these days except for the smokey meat at Louis Mueller's, which keeps drawing the folks in from miles around. It's in the high nineties at lunchtime, but there's no air-conditioning here, just a few giant fans that push the smoke around the dark, cavernous barbecue hall. Over the most meltingly tender 12-hour-smoked beef ribs you ever could taste, Don chats about his childhood, his hometown, the music that directed the course of his life, his time with the biggest-selling band on the planet, and his return to a notably successful solo career after a 15-year hiatus.

"Ugly buildings, politicians and whores all get respect if they stick around long enough," Henley observed a couple of nights earlier while filming a show at Austin City Limits, wryly adding, "I don't know which of those categories I fit into." It's an unusually droll, self-deprecating tack for an American star to take, but it fits the new album's tone of reflective humility, and its mood of wistful regret for decaying values and lost opportunities. Backed by a top-notch band in fanciful Western headgear, it's a wonderful performance, with the new songs punctuated by highlights from Henley's solo career, and a succession of gilt-edged guests coming up to share a song, among them Martina McBride and Trisha Yearwood.



Don apologises for his own voice's slight rustiness, victim to a bronchial complaint; but thanks to the wonders of American pharmaceuticals, he explains – an eyebrow smirkingly raised at his former reputation – he's able to appear tonight. For "Praying For Rain", a climate-change song cunningly placed in the mouth of a small farmer, the guests all reassemble alongside Don, to give the song's title-hook the yearning resonance of a church choir meeting.

The following night, Don's back at Austin City Limits to record another show, this one for Sirius XM Radio, and followed by a genial Q&A session with the audience. We learn about the first record Don bought ("Hound Dog"), the first big rock show he attended (a Byrds package, though he was more impressed by Mitch Ryder & The Detroit Wheels), and how, as a nine-year-old kid, he wandered backstage at a Lawrence Welk show to find the bandleader with a pair of nun "groupies". It's a relaxed journey through the past to his hometown Cass County, a place "where the Old South meets the West", which Henley is now trying to preserve. He's funded the renovation of the town's old courthouse, the latest example of the heritage philanthropy that previously saw him found the Walden Woods Project to protect the area around Thoreau's cabin from commercial development.

Henley's a significant contributor to various other charities, and while other celebrity voices may be more politically strident, few are as prepared to put their money where their mouth is. Between 1978 and 2008, Henley was reported as having donated more than $680,000 to the Democratic Party; and with contributions totalling $46,000, he was one of the biggest celebrity donors during the last election campaign. Those political convictions show no sign of slackening just yet.

This, perhaps, is the context in which his patronage of Louis Mueller's barbecue joint should be viewed: support for a small business with a deeply ingrained heritage, catering to local needs rather than global vested interests. As we prepare to head back to Austin, a waiter hurries out to the car bearing his doggy-bag. Like everything in Texas, it's bigger than elsewhere, a two-feet-square version of the tinfoil trays from your local Indian takeaway. Supper's sorted, then.

ROBIN MARCHANT/STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES

Henley records a show for Sirius XM Radio at the Moody Theater in Austin, Texas, Sept 2, 2015

***UNCUT*: Since your earlier solo albums, the Americana thing has shifted country music back to a rootsier sound, like on your new LP...**

DON HENLEY: Yes, thank God! Country music goes through cycles, like pop music. It goes through cycles of shallowness and poppiness and commerciality, then there'll be a backlash and it'll go back to more rootsy kind of stuff; and I've reached a point in my life where I want to go back to my roots. The Eagles started out as what you might call Americana, country-rock, and I wanted to return to that. All of these kids are doing country albums now, and none of them are from the country, they're all from the suburbs. I'm a country boy, I'm from the sticks, so if anybody has the right to do a bona fide country album, it's me!

There's a very reflective cast to a lot of the songs on the LP. Do you find that you start out your writing career singing about your hopes for the future, and as you grow older, it becomes all about the past?

To some degree. Though there are some songs on there about the present, too. I deliberately close the album with a song called "Where I Am Now", after all the sad, morbid songs about mortality! I mean, "Train In The Distance" is really about mortality, y'know – it's comin'! – but then I close by thinking that, all things considered, my life is pretty damn good. But this album is more about interior landscapes than exterior landscapes.

Is country the natural home these days for the kind of singer-songwriters who would have been on Asylum, Warner and Elektra back in the '70s?

Yeah, probably; and Americana certainly is. Someone said to me the other day, "I was wondering what this term 'Americana' meant, and now I realise: it's country music for smart people!" But that's the way it's moving, because in cities like Los Angeles and New York, the music is becoming more urban, and the singer-songwriters are moving towards the middle of the country. There's a lot of cool stuff going on in Nashville, a lot of new bands, a whole bohemian thing growing there.

You include a Jesse Winchester song on the new album, and I noticed at the show the other night, the music immediately before you came on followed his "Mississippi You're On My Mind" with Merle Haggard's "Okie From Muskogee", and it seemed so apposite for where you and the Eagles came from: midway between wistful draft-dodger and ironic good ol' boy.

Yeah – you know, when Merle Haggard does his shows now, he basically gets up and apologises for "Okie From Muskogee"! 'Cos that's not who he is – he's into the pot now [*see "It's All Going To Pot" with Willie Nelson*]. He played at a little theatre in my old home town, we brought him in there, and when he sang "Okie...", he kinda sheepishly murmured, "It's not where I'm at now."

I love his duet with you on "The Cost Of Living", that's just a killer song.

Thank you. I'm very proud of that song, and I wrote it with Merle Haggard in mind. It was a trip getting him to come and sing it, 'cos he's a little old and cantankerous now, but he did it, bless his heart... He showed up.

The album was mostly co-written and co-produced with Stan Lynch. How did two drummers get to be such good songwriters? I presume you're familiar with the old joke about what you call someone who hangs around with musicians...

Yeah, what's got three legs and an asshole on top? A drumstool! I know all the drummer jokes! Stan Lynch and I are just kindred spirits, we've both been the drummers in bands, had conflicts in bands, and we became friends way back. We're soul brothers, we can talk about anything: when you write songs with someone, you have to be real open with them, you have to be able to reveal the real philosophical, personal things, and Stan and I can do that. He's also got a great sense of humour – he helps inject humour into songs that might otherwise be a little too dark.

I liked the story you told about Lawrence Welk and the nuns. Was that true?

Yes, absolutely true, he was strolling around backstage with a nun on each arm! He was squeaky clean, you know, the clean guy. My parents loved him, and we went to see them when I was nine years old. I was really taken with the drummer, and went to get his autograph. I just had the balls to go backstage, nobody stopped me, and there was Lawrence Welk, strolling around with the nuns.

You moved to LA just as LA was turning country back in the late '60s. Did you know that was happening, or was it just fortuitous?

No, I knew it was happening – even in our small town in Texas, we'd read about The Flying Burrito Brothers and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Poco, and bought their albums. We'd been listening to country music all our lives, and playing rock music, so we thought, 'Why not combine the two, like these guys?' My band Shiloh had been a covers band; we'd play soul music in clubs, which is where I got some of the hoarseness in my voice. We wore out two Ford Econoline vans, driving all over Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana, over a five- or six-year period. But we heard about that music, and started writing our own material, then we ran into Kenny Rogers, who brought us to LA.

> **"Americana is country music for smart people!"**
> **DON HENLEY**

An old acquaintance of yours, Ron Stone, once observed that the whole LA country sound was an entirely imported sound – none of you actually came from California, you were all migrants.

No, it was from all parts of the country. The only one of the Eagles who's Californian is Timothy Schmit, he's from Sacramento. I was born in Texas, Glenn Frey is from Michigan, Bernie Leadon was born in Minnesota but raised in Florida, Don Felder was from Florida, Randy Meisner was from Nebraska, and Joe Walsh is from all over the place! He went to high school in New Jersey, but also lived in Ohio and Kansas. So yeah, it was an amalgam of America. And Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young are from even further afield, though Crosby is Californian, I think. So he's right, it was an imported sound.

Compared with people like Gram Parsons and Gene Clark, whose talent dissipated, the Eagles seemed very focused and ambitious when they started.

They were doing more substances than we were, I think.

You spent time rehearsing up in Aspen before making your LA debut...

Yes, for some reason, Geffen sent us up there. We didn't have much of a repertoire at the time – we were doing covers, and a few songs Glenn had written. But they didn't ➤

Too much: Elvis on the *Louisiana Hayride* radio show in 1955

really care, they were so drunk and so high, they'd dance to anything! Then we came back to LA and tried to write some songs, and eventually were sent over to London to work with Glyn Johns – I think they wanted to get us away from the drugs and the women! None of us had ever been out of the country before, except for Bernie, who'd been on the road with the Burritos. It was a huge culture-shock. Trying to find Mexican food in London... and the burgers were horrible!

The Eagles seemed to be instantly successful – no sooner had your first single and album come out than you were everywhere.
Well, it might seem that way if you don't count the six years of driving around Texas in an Econoline! But yes, as the Eagles we did have success right off the bat. And then we followed it up with this artsy-fartsy concept album – it was almost as if our reaction to success was, "We don't want to have another LP with hit singles on it!"

I loved *Desperado*!
The record companies hated it!

I thought it was your equivalent of The Band's second album, a mythopoeic vista of America.
Right. Well, the people at the label let us do it, but they hated it. I remember the head of Atlantic Records, Jerry Greenberg, who was our distributor then, he listened to it and said, "Oh God, they've gone and made a fuckin' cowboy album!" Because they didn't hear any singles. "Desperado" was never a hit for us – it didn't become well recognised 'til Linda Ronstadt covered it.

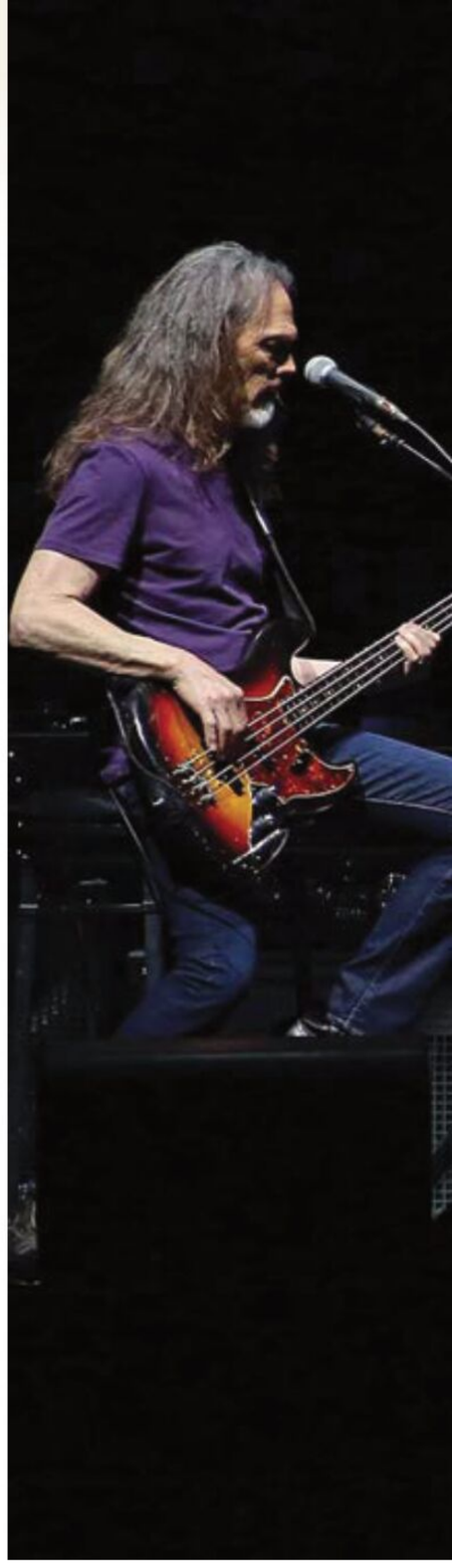
The Eagles, Fleetwood Mac and Steely Dan represented the high-water mark of a certain type of rock music with high production values. You always seemed like perfectionists...
Mmmm... we did get labelled with that, but we weren't perfectionists. We did strive for excellence, and that's two different things. There are flaws all over those Eagles records, and I could point them out to you. They're not perfection. We just tried to make them good. I just want to do the best I can do, and it's not going to be perfect, ever.

What did you think when you were referred to in a Steely Dan song? (*"Turn up the Eagles, the neighbours are listening"*). Did you think they were taking the piss, or perhaps that it was quite an accolade?
It was a little of both! I know them pretty well, and it was like he was sort of saying, "Everybody in LA's playing this fuckin' record, and I'm sick of it!" It was a little bit of an acknowledgement, and a little bit taking the piss, because we had the same management – still do – but you know, they're very droll, Fagen in particular. We repaid them in "Hotel California", with the line *"They stab it with their steely knives, but they still can't slay the beast"*. That was my rejoinder.

You had a love/hate relationship with David Geffen...
I think the hate is much stronger than the love!

He called you a "natural malcontent", which doesn't sound all that bad of a thing to be...
That's just him mouthing off, I don't care what he says about me. Everybody knows who he is, and what he is. I don't need to say a thing about him, because everybody knows.

It's just a puzzle why you re-signed with him later.
Yeah, well, he's very slick, and he's got a good line of bullshit: he came to me and he said, "Nobody understands you like me, I'm still your biggest fan, you know I love and respect your music" – and it was just enough at that time, he was the devil I knew, and so I went with it, and it was a big mistake. I learned a lot from him, about the realities of the business. And at the end of the day, he did give us a contract, which I appreciate, the fact that he signed us to the label and got us into the spotlight. But then he went and sold the company, and we woke up one day and found ourselves on a different label. I have far more respect for Kenny Rogers, for getting me my first record deal, and getting me from a little town in Texas to LA, and putting me up at his house: he is a totally straight-ahead, honest good guy, and I owe him a great debt of gratitude.



"There are flaws all over those Eagles records"
DON HENLEY

When you start a band, it's like a gang, done partly for the fellowship; but when you reunite, is it done mostly for the music?
To be perfectly honest, it's partly for the music, and partly for the money! When the Eagles broke up for 14 years, we didn't know there were so many people who still wanted to see us play. We were just too angry and fed up with each other: "I'm not getting onstage with that guy again, no matter how many people want to see us!" But when we started touring again, we were just flabbergasted at how many people were turning up. We've been together now longer since the reunion than we were originally. I don't know if we'll ever play together again, we could have done our last show; or we may decide in a year or two to go out and do some more dates together.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a solo career, as opposed to a band career?

HENLEY'S COUNTRY RADIO ROOTS

Tuning in with Don and his pa in the Pelican State

"MY dad and I used to listen to country in the car, a station called KWKH in Shreveport, Louisiana. Back in those days there were about four national radio programmes like the *Grand Ole Opry*, called radio barn-dance programmes. I think there was one in Virginia, one in Missouri or Arkansas, the Opry in Nashville, and there was the *Louisiana Hayride* in Shreveport.

The *Opry* was 'proper', and they wouldn't allow Hank Williams on as he was too much of a bad one, so he went down to the *Louisiana Hayride*. Same thing with Johnny Cash, he was too much of a bad boy, and George Jones – anyone who had too much to do with drugs or drink, they didn't want them up there. And Elvis – he was too radical, so he made his first appearance on the *Louisiana Hayride*. Its heyday was from 1948 to about 1961. I've heard they're going to revive it, as the building is still there, a beautiful old place. Me and my dad would listen to that programme and that's where I got my country music education. So this is one of those life-circle things, coming back to where I started."

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Life in the slower lane: the Eagles' Timothy B Schmit, Bernie Leadon, Don Henley and Glenn Frey at Perth Arena, February 18, 2015

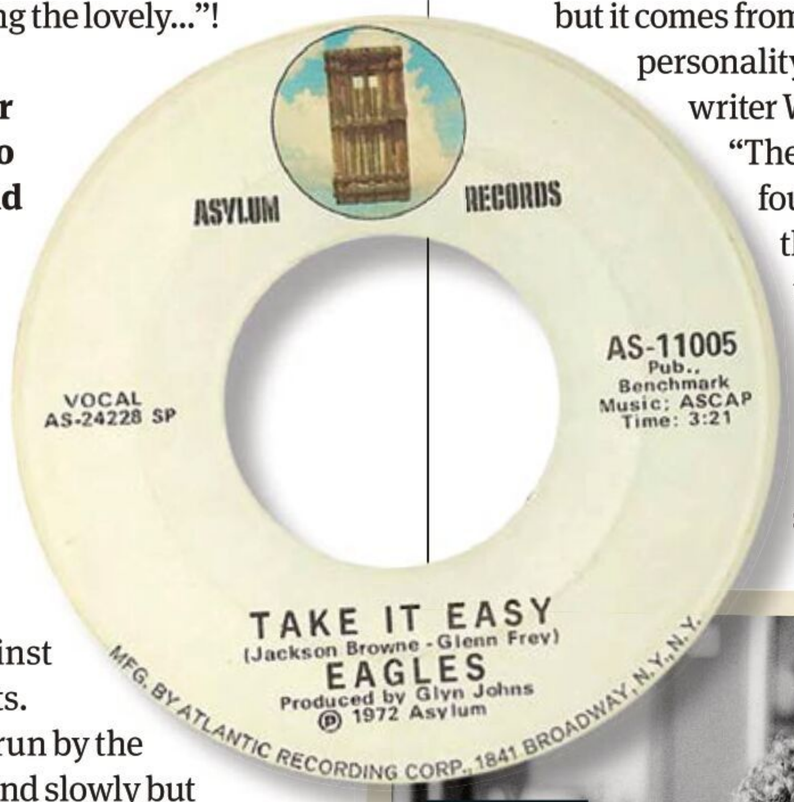
It's a little tougher being in the solo spotlight all the time, singing all the songs in a set. In the Eagles we get to rotate, so I get to rest my voice between songs; but when I have to get up there and sing for an hour and a half without stopping, it's tough. I might start doing what the R'n'B singers used to do and let some of the background girl singers come up and do solo spots: "Gentlemen, presenting the lovely..."!

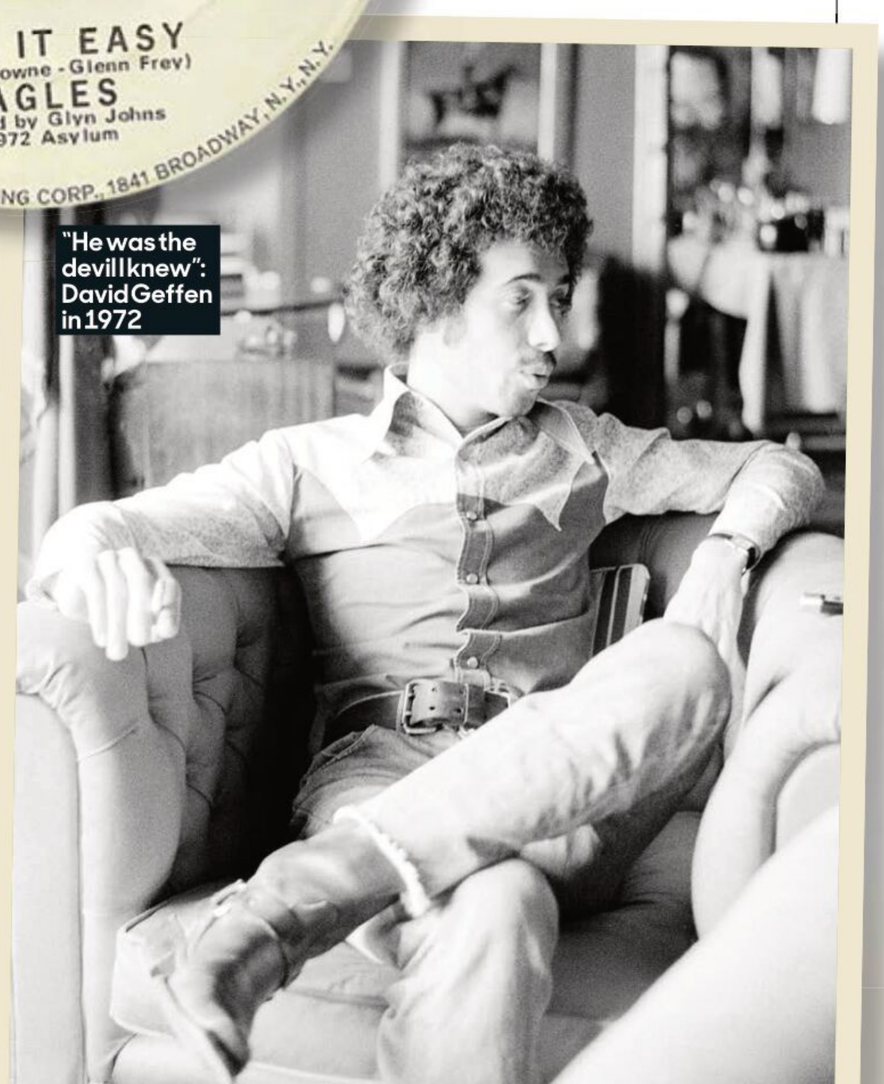
At the show the other night, you referred to "the backward island of darkness on 12th Street". What did you mean by that? It's the Texas Capitol Building. Texas is a real paradox: it's full of generous, good-hearted people, but when it comes to politics, they vote against their own best interests. This state is basically run by the oil and gas industry, and slowly but surely they're taking control away from all the towns and cities. I would not hesitate to say that this is the worst administration that we have ever had in the history of Texas. We went from Bush to Parry, and now we've got this new guy, Abbott, and they're all cut from the same cloth. It's ironic, because Austin is such a liberal town, but the rest of the state elects these people and sends them here, so we have this dark, backward little island here in the middle of a wonderful musical, artistic culture.

So, when will you be standing for governor?

No, no, I like the job I have now! I wouldn't want that job, it's a no-win situation.

You once said that "the creative impulse comes from the dark side". What did you mean by that?
I think it's true, to a certain extent. It doesn't mean that all the creations have to be dark, but it comes from a certain side of the personality. That great Southern writer Willa Cather said, "There are only three or four stories in life, and they keep repeating themselves just as desperately as if they had never happened" – so you just keep expanding on the same themes.




"He was the devil I knew": David Geffen in 1972

When you're writing a song, if you're trying too hard, can you iron the life out of it?
Yes, you can paralyse yourself. If I reach a roadblock, I'll just go and do something else, drive around, load the dishwasher – I've often thought of songs while doing menial tasks. But I do try hard on the lyrics. I tried to make this new LP very straightforward: it's a country album, and country language is very direct. But I think I made some fairly subtle points. I mean, "Praying For Rain" is really about climate change, but it's the gentlest, kindest way I could say it to the redneck faction here in America that doesn't want to fuckin' hear about it. So I put it in the character of a humble farmer. The giveaway line is, *"Maybe we just took too much and put too little back/It isn't knowledge, it's humility we lack"*.

It has a lovely warm feeling, like a choir.
I just tried to fill that song with humility: *"Lord, I've never asked for much, and I don't mean to complain"*. It reminds me a lot of my father, who never went to church; he'd get out on Sunday mornings and plough the garden with a mule, that was his form of meditation, his sacrament, and I thought, that's more religious, more honouring the fertility of the earth, than sitting in some fucking building listening to some guy yell at you about how you're going to fucking burn to a crisp. I admired my old man and his ethic. I've been researching my family tree – when you get to be my age, you start caring about that stuff; when you're younger, you don't care about your ancestral trail and roots, you just want to get away from it. And sometimes, when I go home, I remember why I left! I still have a love/hate relationship with my home town. And with the state of Texas. And with America!

MATT JELONEK/WIREIMAGE, MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: 1969–2012

JOE WALSH SOLO

Before the Eagles… and after. The steady rise, precipitous fall and self-willed reincarnation of rock's tragicomic Clown Prince.

BY BUD SCOPPA

ON a trip to Cleveland in 1968, ABC Records staff producer Bill Szymczyk – who'd made a name for himself by revitalising the career of BB King – went to see local band The James Gang and was so blown away by the performance of 21-year-old guitar-playing frontman Joe Walsh that he got them signed to his label. Walsh was the junior member of the trio when they recorded their 1969 debut LP, *Yer' Album*, splitting songwriting credits and lead vocals with bassist Tom Kriss and drummer Jim Fox. But Szymczyk, who'd bonded with Walsh over their mutual obsession with gear and electronics, knew he had an uncommonly gifted young musician on his hands and featured him at every possible moment. Several of the tracks were based on jams, including the prototype "Funk #48". But the singer/guitarist's raw talent was thrillingly apparent on "I Don't Have The Time", a smokin' slab of Midwestern teenage attitude, and "Collage", which interweaves Walsh's silky acoustic picking with a gossamer string section. They also cut three cover songs, the most adventurous of which is an intricate six-minute rendition of Stephen Stills' Buffalo Springfield classic "Bluebird" on which Walsh and Szymczyk showcase the sonic tricks they'd been cooking up.

Walsh was fully in control when the band released its second album, *James Gang Rides Again*, in July 1970. The propulsive "Funk #49", on which he and new bass player Dale Peters trade blistering volleys, became an FM radio hit and put the regionally popular group on the national map. When Pete Townshend heard the LP, he went "nuts-rapturous about" Walsh and invited The James Gang to open 13 dates on their UK tour behind *Tommy* that October. Walsh gifted Townshend with the 1959 Gretsch Chet Atkins hollow-body he'd use extensively in the studio, starting, memorably, with *Who's Next*. Townshend returned the favour by helping Walsh master the technique of playing lead and rhythm simultaneously, while Keith Moon schooled him in what Joe later described as "the art of hotel damage".

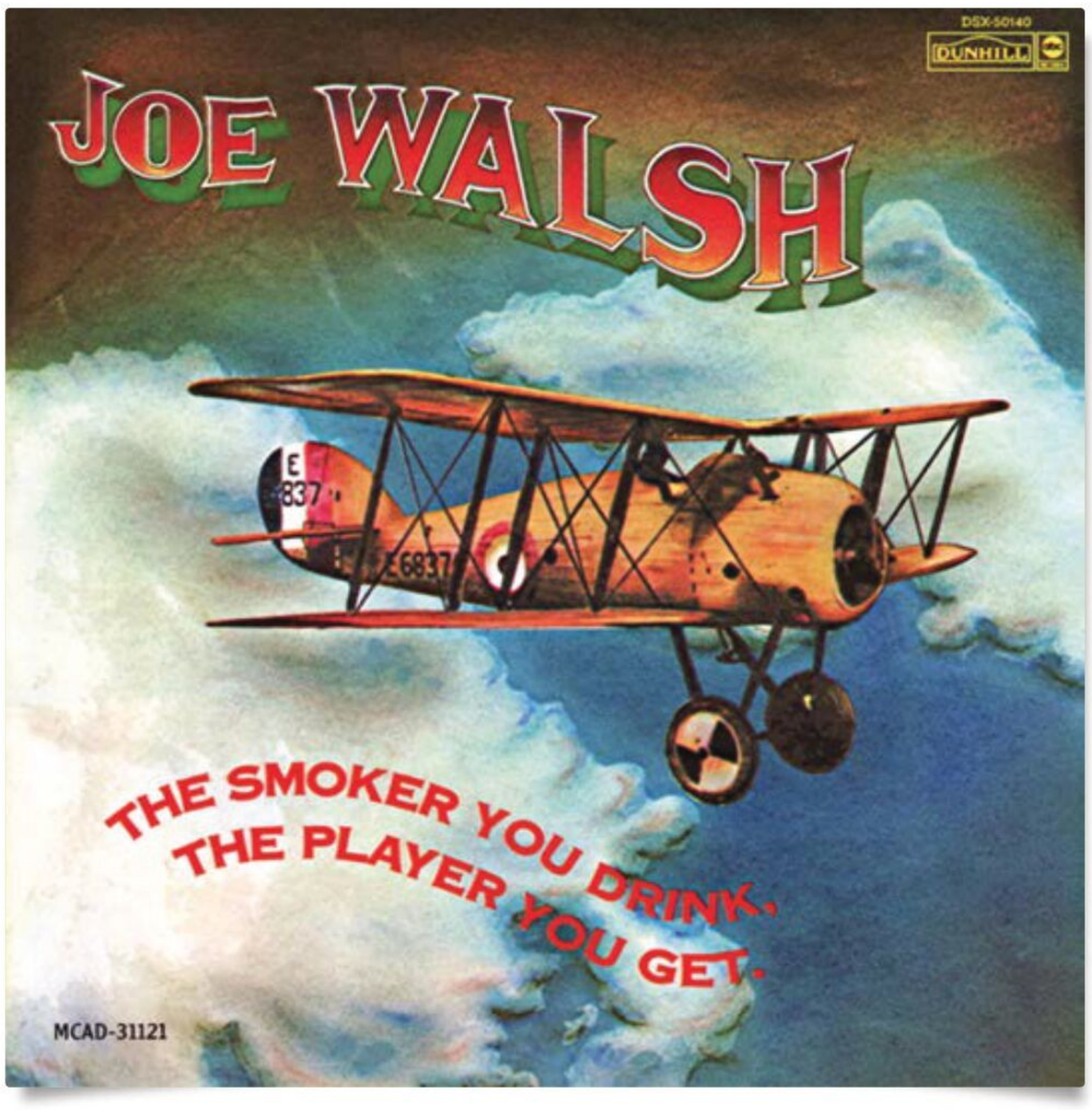
Released in 1971, *Thirds* was a step backward in terms of both energy and material, bogged down by mediocre songs from Fox and Peters and just four from Walsh. The album's saving grace is the jam rocker "Walk Away", on which Walsh howls in an adenoidal vibrato amid a fusillade of molten riffs, setting the template for the sound he'd develop during his solo career. Soon thereafter, Walsh, realising the limitations of what he could accomplish with The James Gang, decided to set off in another direction. The ham-fisted *James Gang Live In Concert*, which made Carnegie Hall sound like an aircraft hangar, was his anticlimactic swan song with the group.

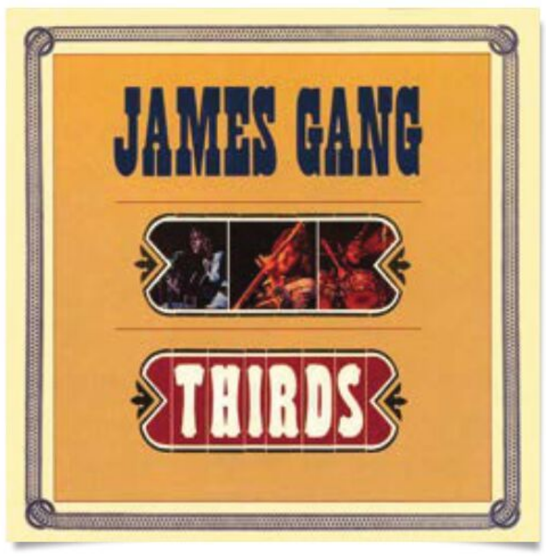
Barnstorm sounds as warm as a crackling fire and panoramic as the Rockies

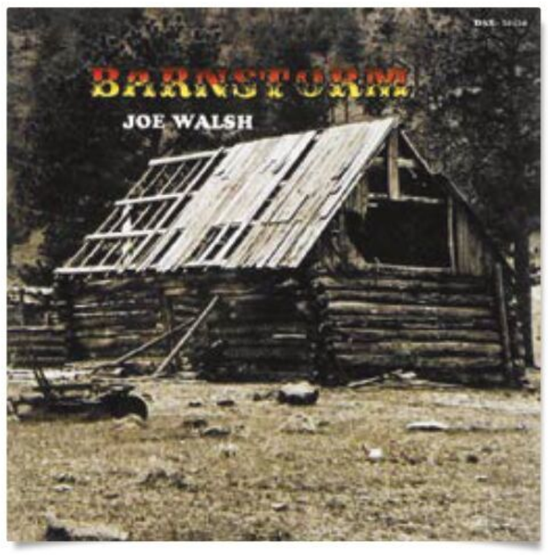
Heading west from Cleveland to Boulder, where Szymczyk had set up shop, Walsh formed a new band, Barnstorm, with drummer Joe Vitale, bassist Kenny Passarelli and keyboard player Rocke Grace. After Szymczyk talked fellow producer Jim Guercio into letting him work at Guercio's studio, Caribou Ranch, which was still under construction, he brought in the newly formed band and recorded 1972's *Barnstorm* there. The album revealed a revitalised Walsh, so in tune with his breathtaking surroundings that you can practically feel the mountain air coursing through his lungs. At once a sylvan song cycle and a portrait of a swaggering new band flexing its muscles, *Barnstorm* sounds as warm as a crackling fire and panoramic as ▶

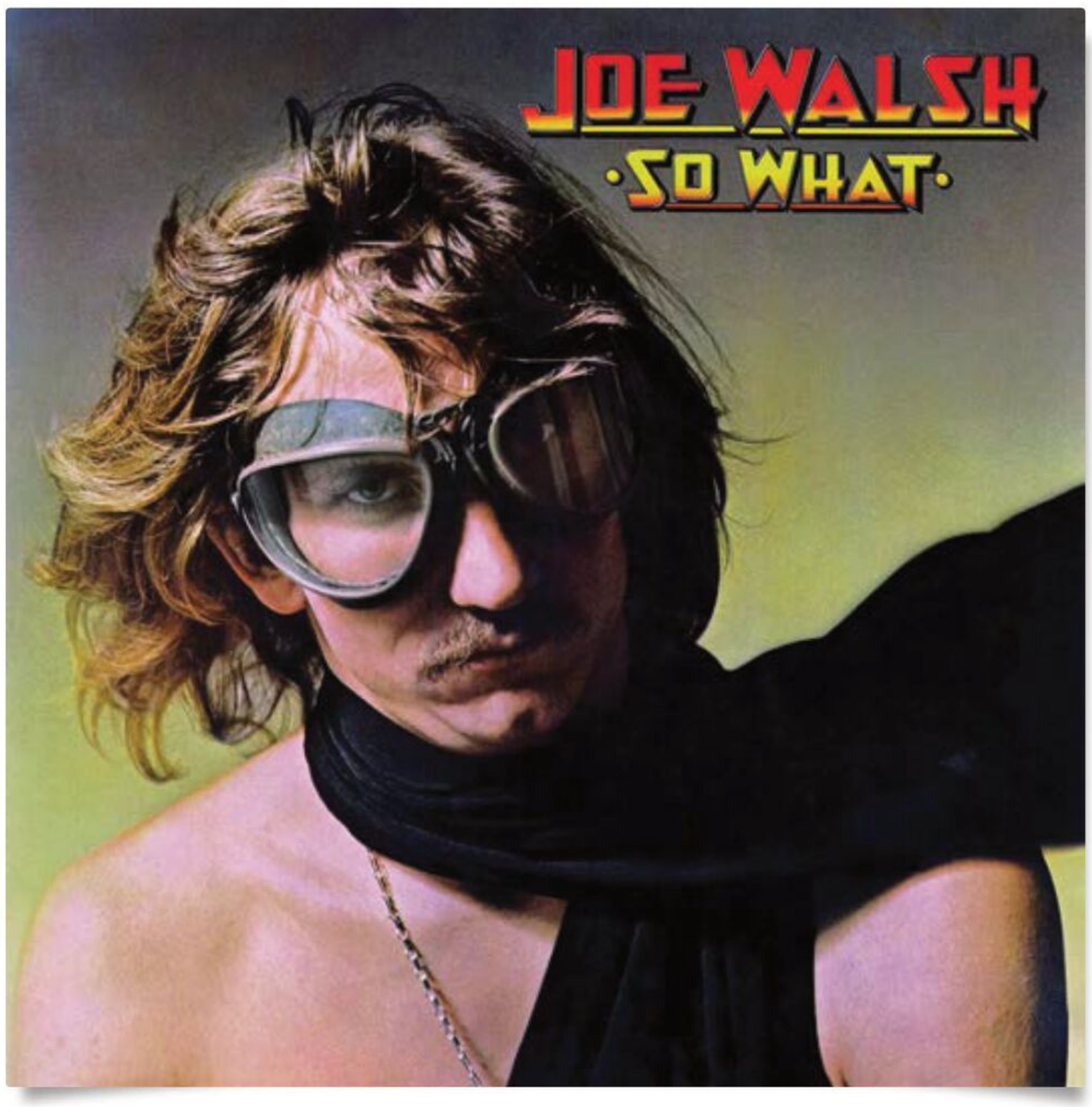
THE JAMES GANG
YER ALBUM
BLUESWAY

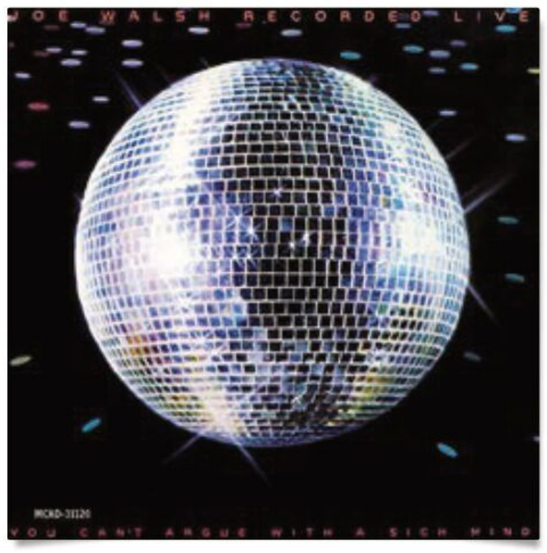
james gang rides again
MCAD-31145


DUNHILL
JOE WALSH
THE SMOKER YOU DRINK, THE PLAYER YOU GET.
MCAD-31121


JAMES GANG
THIRDS


BARNSTORM
JOE WALSH


JOE WALSH
·SO WHAT·


JOE WALSH RECORDED LIVE
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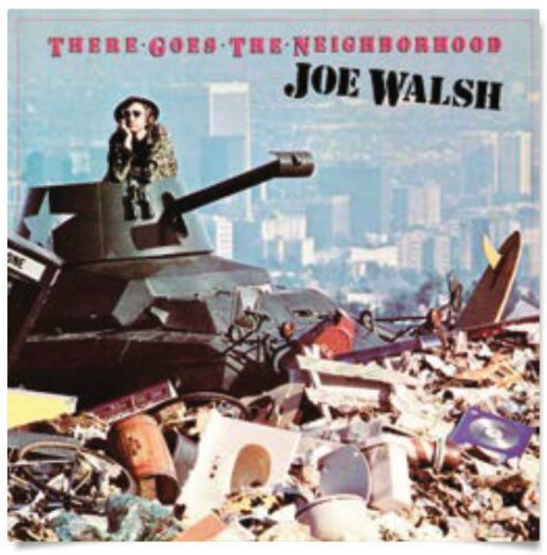
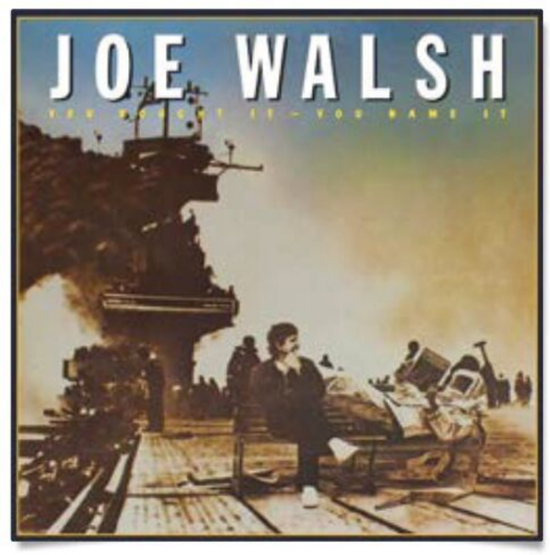
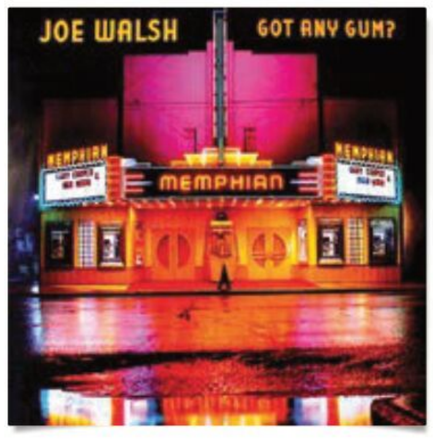
YOU CAN'T ARGUE WITH A SICK MIND

JOE WALSH

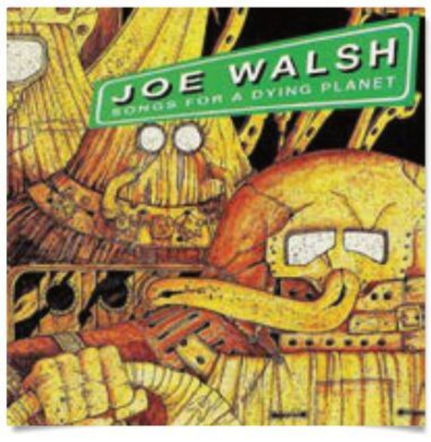

THERE·GOES·THE·NEIGHBORHOOD
JOE WALSH

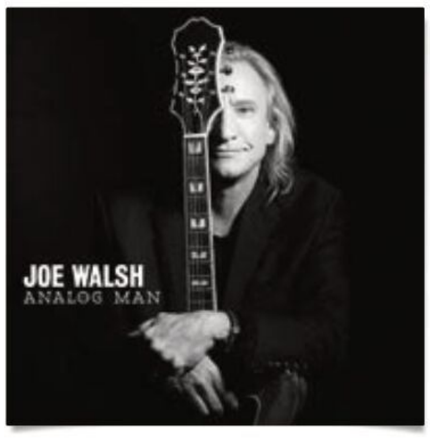

JOE WALSH

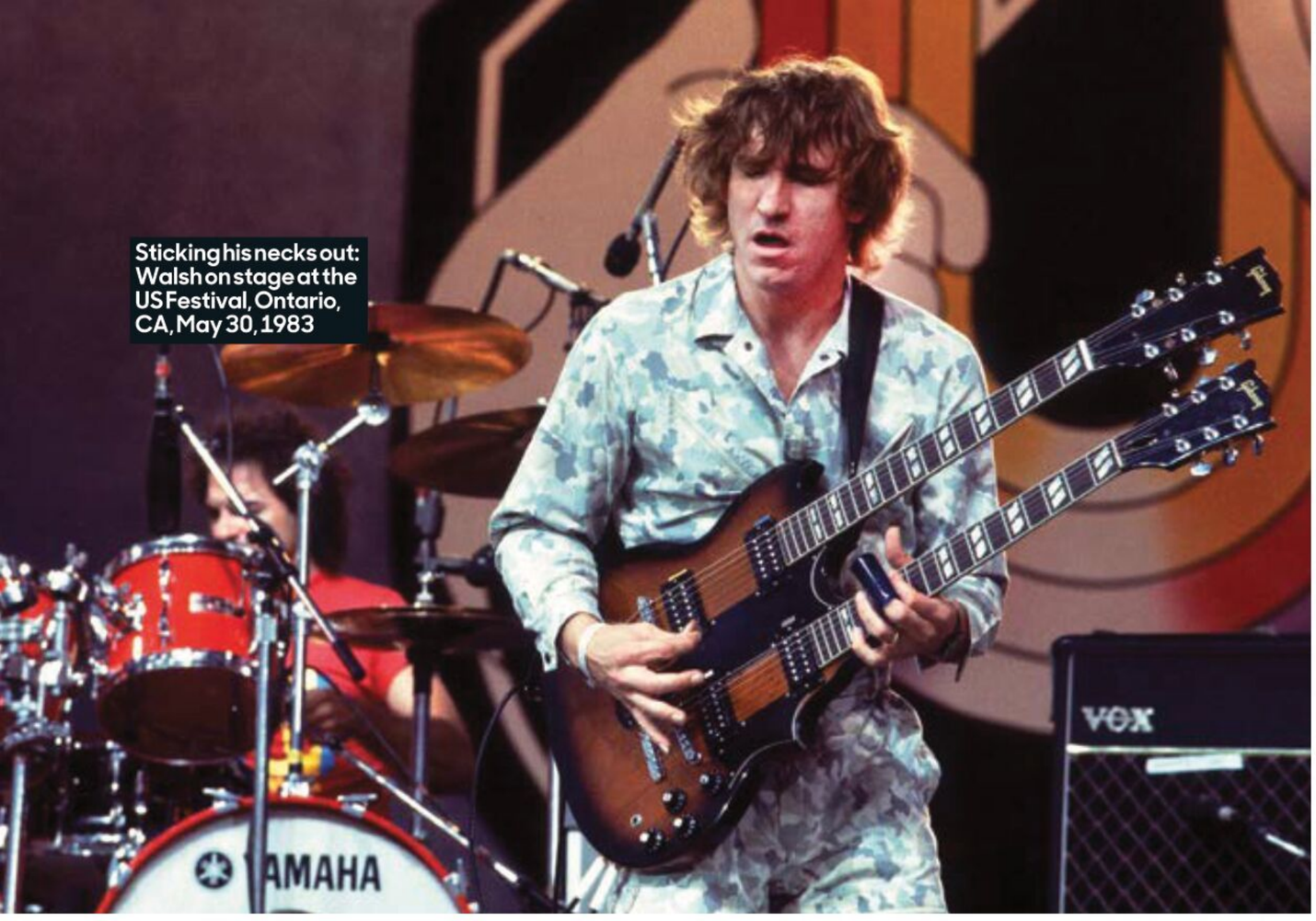
The Confessor
Joe Walsh


JOE WALSH
GOT ANY GUM?
MEMPHIAN
MEMPHIAN
MEMPHIAN

ORDINARY AVERAGE GUY


JOE WALSH
SONGS FOR A DYING PLANET


JOE WALSH
ANALOG MAN



Sticking his necks out: Walsh on stage at the US Festival, Ontario, CA, May 30, 1983

the surrounding Rockies. It marked an exponential leap for Walsh, who'd refined his songcraft and achieved a new degree of command vocally – but the LP was overlooked at first by James Gang fans, who had no idea that it was the work of Walsh's new group. ABC and management corrected that oversight before the band's first tour. "The name Joe Walsh, that was the ticket," Vitale noted. "Seeing that on a marquee brought in more people, more tickets were sold."

Barnstorm's 1973 follow-up, *The Smoker You Drink, The Player You Get*, the first LP Walsh would have his name on the cover and the first to credit him as co-producer, introduced some of what would become staples of his style – including his distinctively wry, self-mocking titles. Joe was a huge Duane Allman fan, and after his death he started playing slide himself, picking up the nuances so quickly and naturally that Szymczyk suggested early in the project that the band come up with a song to showcase it. They started working on a slow, bluesy shuffle, but Walsh and Szymczyk had a falling out before they'd gotten very far with it, and Walsh took the band to Miami to work on the album with Ron and Howie Albert.

The song, "Rocky Mountain Way", with its brontosaurus slide riff and bizarro talk box solo, eclipsed everything Walsh had done to that point, artistically and commercially, and his audacious decision to break out the talk box had a lot to do with it. This quirky gizmo had been dreamed up by country singer Dottie West's husband Bill, who'd given the prototype to Walsh during his James Gang days. "You move your mouth and hold your breath, like you're talking," Walsh explained. "And the guitar sound from your amp then gets modulated in your mouth, and that's picked up by your vocal mic. So it's your guitar talking." Walsh also made clever use of a synth on "Rocky Mountain Way" and elsewhere on the album, which would rocket him to stardom. Good thing his name was on the cover.

As it turned out, Joe was just getting started. At the request of his new manager, Irving Azoff, he left Boulder for sunnier, crazier Los Angeles, where he was quickly befriended by members of Irving's crew, including Linda Ronstadt, Jackson Browne, JD Souther, the Eagles and Dan Fogelberg, for whom Walsh produced and played on 1974's *Souvenirs*, the singer-songwriter's acclaimed second album. Two months later, Walsh released his masterpiece, *So What*, which juxtaposes visceral electric-guitar workouts with laidback acoustic ballads enriched by Eagles-like harmonies. Co-produced by Walsh and John Stronach, with former producer Bill Szymczyk responsible for one track, the LP is powered by the burly yet aerodynamic rockers "Welcome To The Club", "Time Out" and "Turn To Stone". Each boasts a shimmering riff as distinctive as anything by Keith Richards or Townshend, delivered with a potent combination of refinement and raunch. Walsh had originally recorded "Turn To Stone" for *Barnstorm*, but the recut version shows how well he'd honed his style over the succeeding two years. The first performance relied on power chording for impact; the second shows Walsh playing less but with more awareness of the power of suggestion. The increase in restraint results in a sizable increase in drama.

"Rocky Mountain Way" eclipsed everything Walsh had done so far

These signature songs coexist with a pair of delicately sung, harmony-enriched ballads, "Falling Down" and "Help Me Through The Night"; an inexplicably touching synthesiser performance of a brief segment from Ravel's 'Mother Goose Suite', which he titled "Pavanne"; the richly evocative, almost completely instrumental "County Fair"; and the unbearably poignant "Song For Emma", a luminous elegy for Walsh's daughter who'd lost her life in a car accident aged four.

Joe reached deep into his soul for that one. "I took a four-track recorder up to his house," Szymczyk recalled, "and he played the piano part over and over – there was no one take. It was a really emotional time, and that night I took all the four tracks, went down to the studio and he went to bed. He didn't hear the track again until I had done everything to it; then he came in and sang it."

Walsh titled the album *So What* because, he later explained, "I had this 'so what' attitude. I was angry. I was really mad at God. And I felt that was a great reason to drink. 'Poor me. God took my daughter away.' And so I got an attitude, like, 'This is the worst thing that's ever happened. I don't care about anything.' Just to justify that it was OK to get screwed up."

Not the best time to join the wild and crazy Eagles, but adding Walsh was a stroke of genius in Azoff's mind. And it paid off: his guitar locked in with Don Felder's on the harmonised overture that animates *Hotel California*'s epochal title track; wrote "Pretty Maids All In A Row" with Vitale, and came up with the main lick for "Life In The Fast Lane".

Just before becoming an Eagle, Walsh had fulfilled his contract with ABC with the live *You Can't Argue With A Sick Mind*. Recorded at the Santa Monica Civic with a hot-shot one-off band that included Vitale, Felder and bassist Willie Weeks, the LP captured Walsh jamming ecstatically and endlessly on six of his best-known songs.

He still had plenty of gas left in the tank for his first album for Asylum, *But Seriously, Folks...*, recorded while the Eagles were off the road and released two years later. Aside from the streamlined rocker "At The Station" and the Brian Wilson-like instrumental medley "Inner Tube/Theme From Boat Weirdos", the LP was dominated by elegantly tuneful, big-hearted ballads like "Over And Over" and "Indian Summer". But overshadowing the rest of the songs for most listeners was

CRITICS' VERDICTS

SO WHAT

"This latest can only reinforce Walsh's position among the elite of the West Coast rock innovators. It's in much the same style as *Barnstorm* and *The Smoker...* with its very deep drum and bass work, yet is much less stylised. The synths are not so prominent and the guitar more to the fore. The result is much gentler music, even quite classical at times."

BOB COWAN, MELODY MAKER, FEB 8, 1975

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOR-HOOD

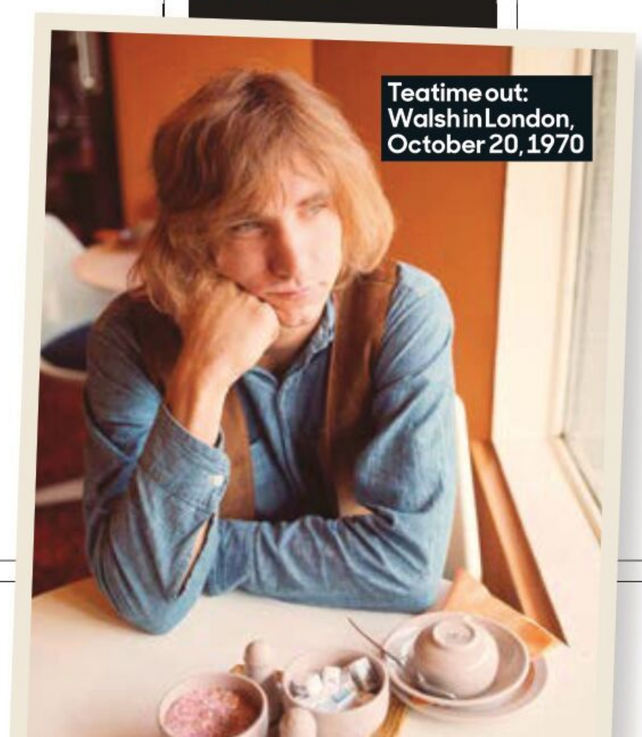
"Closer 'You Never Know' provides the brightest hope for the future music. It's fine flowing funk and is the most painstaking piece of work on display. A restful, pleasant album."

JULIAN WILDE, NME, JUNE 6, 1981

YOU BOUGHT IT...

"An LA recluse worth bothering with. Walsh isn't as sharp a Joe as he was on *But Seriously, Folks...*, but his laconic eye on video youth ('Space Age Whizz Kids'), high-school memories ('Class Of '65'), and pessimism ('The Worry Song') is still worth a chuckle. And 'I Can Play That Rock & Roll' is a wreckerball guitar show as entertaining as 'Life's Been Good'."

RICHARD COOK, NME, SEPT 3, 1983


Teatime out: Walsh in London, October 20, 1970

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY; MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

Lifesaver: Walsh and Ringo at 'SiriusXM's Town Hall With Ringo Starr' live on the Spectrum Channel, the Troubadour, West Hollywood, January 30, 2012

the stroke-of-genius closer, "Life's Been Good". A signature Walsh riff and a tongue-in-cheek reggae-fied groove set the vibe for his sendup of the rich rock star's lifestyle – the mansion in which he's never set foot, the chainsaw-modified hotel rooms, the Maserati he's legally unable to drive and the soul-sucking all-night benders amount to a devastatingly comedic confessional that pretty much defines the era and forecasts darker days ahead.

Following the epic "In The City", which he recorded for the soundtrack of the 1979 cult classic *The Warriors* – subsequently recut, but not bettered, for *The Long Run* – and in the wake of the Eagles split, Walsh continued his solo career through the lost decade of the 1980s, putting out four albums of progressively diminishing quality while consuming countless fifths of vodka and grams of Bolivian marching powder. He kept it relatively together for 1981's *There Goes The Neighborhood*, upholding his rep with a final burst of inspiration, "Life Of Illusion", on which he cops to his confused state of mind and manages to make it universally relatable, hitting the bullseye with withering lines like *"Pow! Right between the eyes/Oh, how nature loves her little surprises"*. But from there, the drain-circling began in earnest, and listening to his next five LPs is an enervating slog worsened by glossy '80s production, as poor Joe hangs on by his fingernails while being battered by a mortar barrage of gated drums. Aside from its wicked-clever title, the most memorable thing about 1983's *You Bought It – You Name It* is the unfortunate ditty "I.L.B.T.s"; the album had shipped before his new label Warner Bros realised the song title was short for "I Love Big Tits". The less said about *The Confessor* (1985), where tired synth trudging meet epic guitar dustbowl dramas, or the witless Buggles-meets-Van Halen commercial grasping of *Got Any Gum?* (1987), the better.

By the early '90s, Walsh had hit rock bottom. His career was in tatters after Warner dropped him, and when Epic inexplicably picked him up, his friends rushed to his side in a last-ditch effort to rescue him from his descent into unintended self-parody. Vitale co-produced 1991's *Ordinary Average Guy* with him, and Szymczyk returned to helm *Songs For A Dying Planet* the following year, but neither was able to bring Walsh a hit, and Epic dropped him before he could do further damage to his reputation.

With his bridges burned and no prospects in sight, Walsh was in desperate straits, completely through his own doing. "An awful lot of my buddies died before they hit bottom," he said later. "I hit bottom before I died." But in the nick of time, Joe's close friend and future brother-in-law, Ringo Starr, threw him a lifeline, enlisting him for the second edition of his All-Starr Band.

When The Eagles reformed two years later, Walsh had his gig back – provided he could handle it. That moment of truth led to a life-changing decision that would have life-saving consequences as, through a monumental act of will, he managed to clean up at long last. A big part of Walsh's rehabilitation was working his way through the Alcoholics Anonymous 12-step programme, which he documented with a combination of pride and relief in "One Day At A Time", the thematic centrepiece of his 2012 comeback album, *Analog Man*. Appearing 20 years after his previous release, it's the work of an artist whose most remarkable accomplishment may be the fact that he was still around to make it at all.

SLEEVE NOTES JOE WALSH SOLO

JAMES GANG
YER' ALBUM ★★★★
LABEL: Bluesway
RELEASED: 1969
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: The Hit Factory, NYC
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US –

JAMES GANG RIDES AGAIN ★★★★
LABEL: ABC
RELEASED: 1970
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: The Record Plant, Los Angeles
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US –

THIRDS ★★★
LABEL: ABC
RELEASED: 1971
PRODUCED BY: James Gang, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Record Plant, Los Angeles; Cleveland Recording Company, Cleveland; The Hit Factory, NYC
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 51

JAMES GANG LIVE IN CONCERT ★★
LABEL: ABC
RELEASED: 1971
PRODUCED BY: James Gang
Recorded at: Carnegie Hall, NYC
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 24

BARNSTORM
BARNSTORM ★★★★
LABEL: ABC-Dunhill
RELEASED: 1972
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Caribou Ranch, Colorado
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 79 (Billboard Pop Albums)

THE SMOKER YOU DRINK, THE PLAYER YOU GET ★★★★
LABEL: ABC-Dunhill
RELEASED: 1973
PRODUCED BY: Joe Walsh, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Record Plant, Los Angeles; Caribou Ranch, Colorado
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 6 (Billboard Pop Albums)

JOE WALSH
SO WHAT ★★★★★
LABEL: ABC-Dunhill
RELEASED: 1974
PRODUCED BY: Joe Walsh, John Stronach, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: The Record Plant, Los Angeles; The Record Plant, NYC; The Record Plant, Sausalito
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 11

YOU CAN'T ARGUE WITH A SICK MIND ★★★
LABEL: ABC
RELEASED: 1976
PRODUCED BY: Joe Walsh
RECORDED AT: Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, California
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 20

BUT SERIOUSLY, FOLKS... ★★★
LABEL: Asylum
RELEASED: 1978
PRODUCED BY: Joe Walsh, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Bayshore, Florida
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 8

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD ★★★
LABEL: Asylum
RELEASED: 1981
Produced by: Joe Walsh, George "Chocolate" Perry
RECORDED AT: Santa Barbara Sound Recording, California
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 20

YOU BOUGHT IT – YOU NAME IT ★★
LABEL: Warner Bros.
RELEASED: 1983
PRODUCED BY: Joe Walsh, George "Chocolate" Perry, Bill Szymczyk
RECORDED AT: Santa Catalina Island, California
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 48 (Billboard Pop Albums)

THE CONFESSOR ★★
LABEL: Warner Bros.
RELEASED: 1985
PRODUCED BY: Joe Walsh, Keith Olsen
RECORDED AT: Goodnight LA Studios, Los Angeles
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 65

GOT ANY GUM? ★★
LABEL: Warner Bros
RELEASED: 1987
PRODUCED BY: Terry Manning
RECORDED AT: Ardent Recordings, Memphis; Alpha Sound, Memphis
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 113

ORDINARY AVERAGE GUY ★★
LABEL: Epic
RELEASED: 1991
PRODUCED BY: Joe Walsh, Joe Vitale
RECORDED AT: Kiva Recording Studio, Memphis; Pyramid Studios, Chattanooga
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US 112

SONGS FOR A DYING PLANET ★★
LABEL: Epic
RELEASED: 1992
PRODUCED BY: Bill Szymczyk, Joe Vitale
RECORDED AT: Reflection Sound Studio, Charlotte; Kiva West Studio, Los Angeles
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US –

ANALOG MAN ★★★
LABEL: Fantasy
RELEASED: 2012
PRODUCED BY: Jeff Lynne, Joe Walsh, Tim Armstrong
RECORDED AT: unknown
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK – ; US –

FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY

RELEASED: 1982–2021

LIVE & COMPS

The Eagles' hits comps were legendary world beaters; now the live sets are rising to the challenge. BY PETER WATTS

WITH the world's best-selling compilation in their catalogue – that's *Their Greatest Hits (1971–1975)* – you might have thought that the Eagles had no more to offer in the compilation department. But *Their Greatest Hits* was surprisingly limited in scope, only featuring tracks from the first four albums, so nothing from *Hotel California*, and focusing on singles rather than taking in some deeper cuts – and even that wasn't definitive. Moreover, it was an artefact of the vinyl era, which gave it a beautifully streamlined running time but meant that by the time CDs were introduced, there were twice as many minutes to potentially fill.

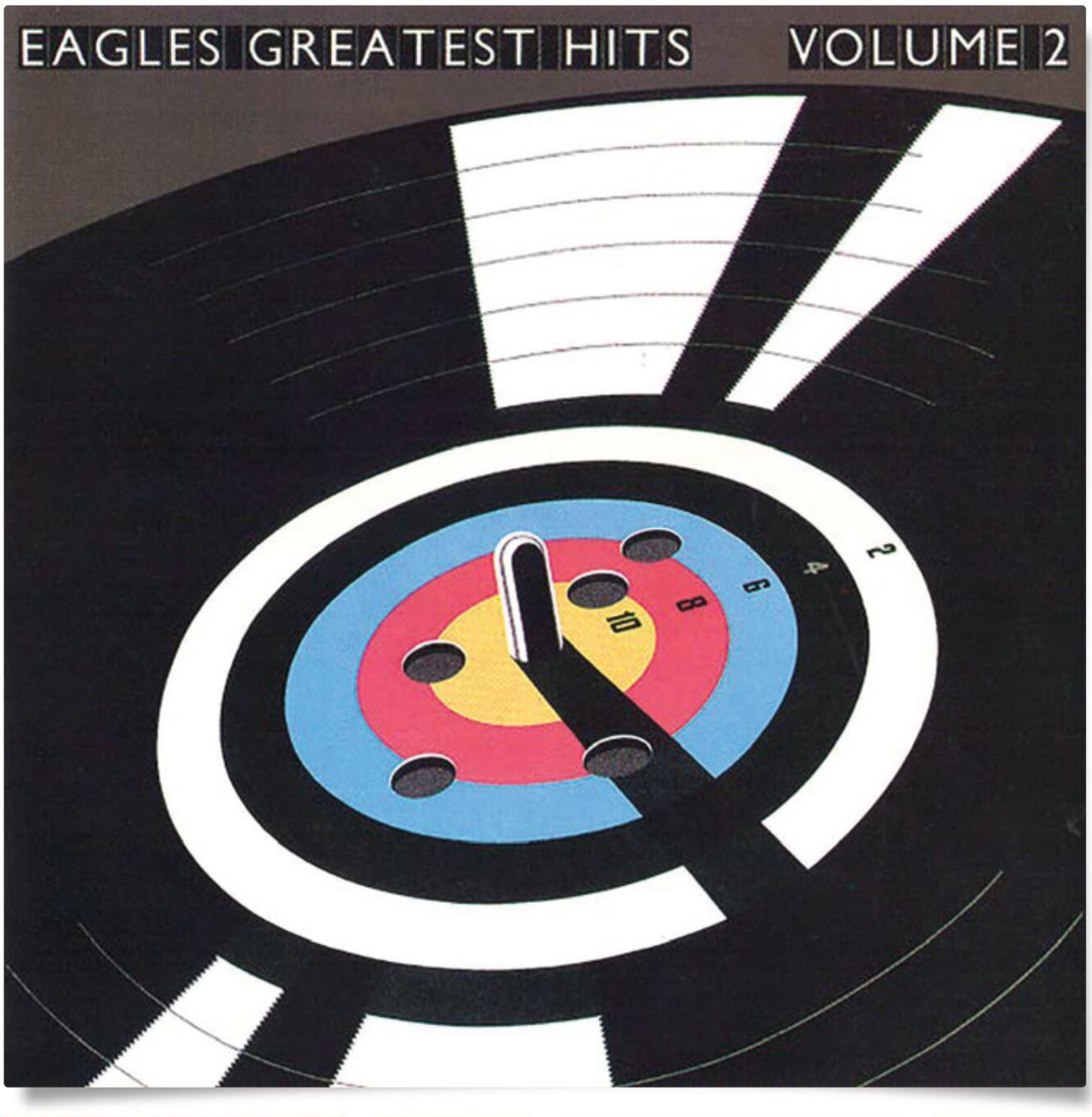
That presented the label with several opportunities, starting with **THEIR GREATEST HITS VOLUME 2** (ASYLUM, 1982) ★★★★. As is traditional, this came out after the band broke up, ensuring Asylum could continue to milk the cow after the contractual obligation of *Eagles Live*. It's a solid construct, taking four songs from *Hotel California* (the title track, "Victim Of Love", "Life In The Fast Lane" and "New Kid In Town") and four from *The Long Run* (the title track, "Heartache Tonight", "The Sad Café" and "I Can't Tell You Why"), then adding "Seven Bridges Road" from *Eagles Live* and, slightly awkwardly, closing with "After The Thrill Is Gone" from 1975's *One Of These Nights*, which could have appeared on the first hits album. However, it does include all the band's singles since *Their Greatest Hits*, other than the non-album Christmas single "Please Come Home For Christmas".

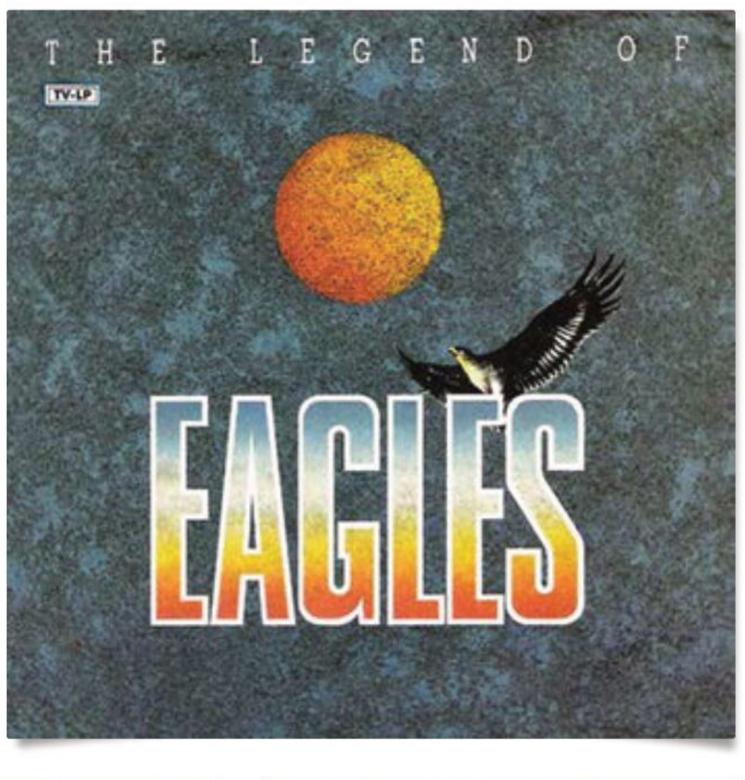
Even if it isn't quite as strong a selection, the record has a pleasing symmetry with *Their Greatest Hits*, even to the extent it closes Side One with a fan favourite album track – in this case "The Sad Café" rather than "Desperado". Everybody who cycled through the band appears, thanks to the inclusion of "After The Thrill Is Gone", which brings in Bernie Leadon. That song, with its theme of emotions that arise when a good thing comes an end, is pointedly placed as the final track, the last goodbye – like a more realistic bookend to "Take It Easy" the first track on *Their Greatest Hits*. Like *Their Greatest Hits*, the record was dismissed by the band – Frey and Henley both released their solo debuts in 1982 and may not have welcomed the competition – but it served a purpose and found a willing audience, eventually selling a handy 11 million records.

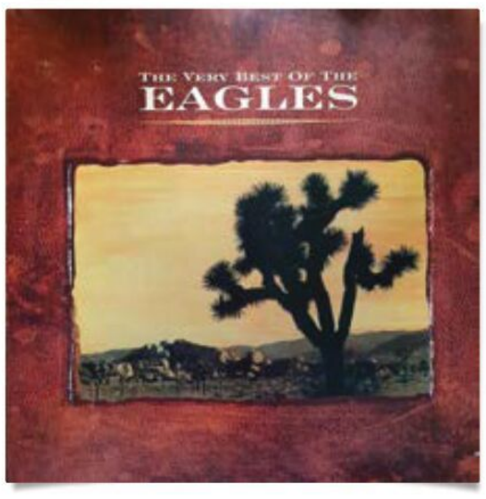
THE BEST OF THE EAGLES (ASYLUM, 1985) ★★★ brought the Eagles onto CD with a short but tasteful selection of 13 tracks that didn't make best use of the opportunity, and **THE LEGEND OF THE EAGLES** (ASYLUM, 1988) ★★★ was no better, simply adding one additional song and rejigging the running order. Next came two albums with the same title – **THE VERY BEST OF THE EAGLES**. The original (ELEKTRA, 1994) ★★★★ had 17 tracks in chronological order with a single curveball, "Doolin-Dalton", accompanying the now stock tracklist of singles (including "James Dean") plus "Desperado". The later release (ELEKTRA, 2001) ★★★★ had the same songs in a different order with a different cover.

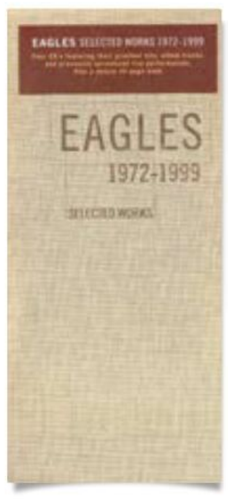
…Forum 76 presents many of their finest moments in an easily digestible form

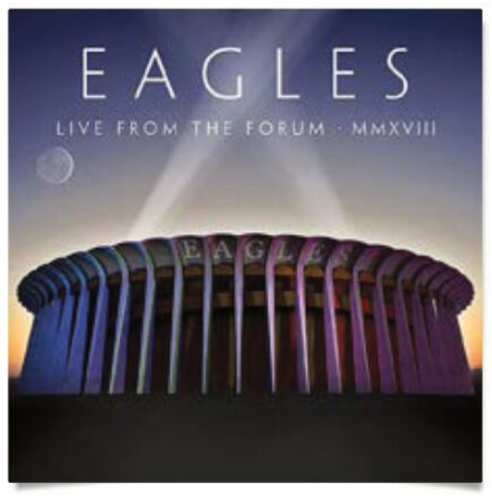
A boxset was next out the gate. **SELECTED WORKS: 1972–1999** (ELEKTRA, 2000) ★★★★ is a four-disc mishmash of singles, strangely sequenced album tracks (essentially divided into fast and slow CDs) and a 1999 concert. The music is good but it's all a bit unwieldy and strangely curated. Warner finally got round to doing the obvious and combined the two volumes of *Their Greatest Hits* to create **THE VERY BEST OF...** (WARNER, 2003) ★★★★★. This has all the tracks from those two albums plus a few extras including some now widely acknowledged classics such as "Ol' 55" and "The Last Resort". There was even room for







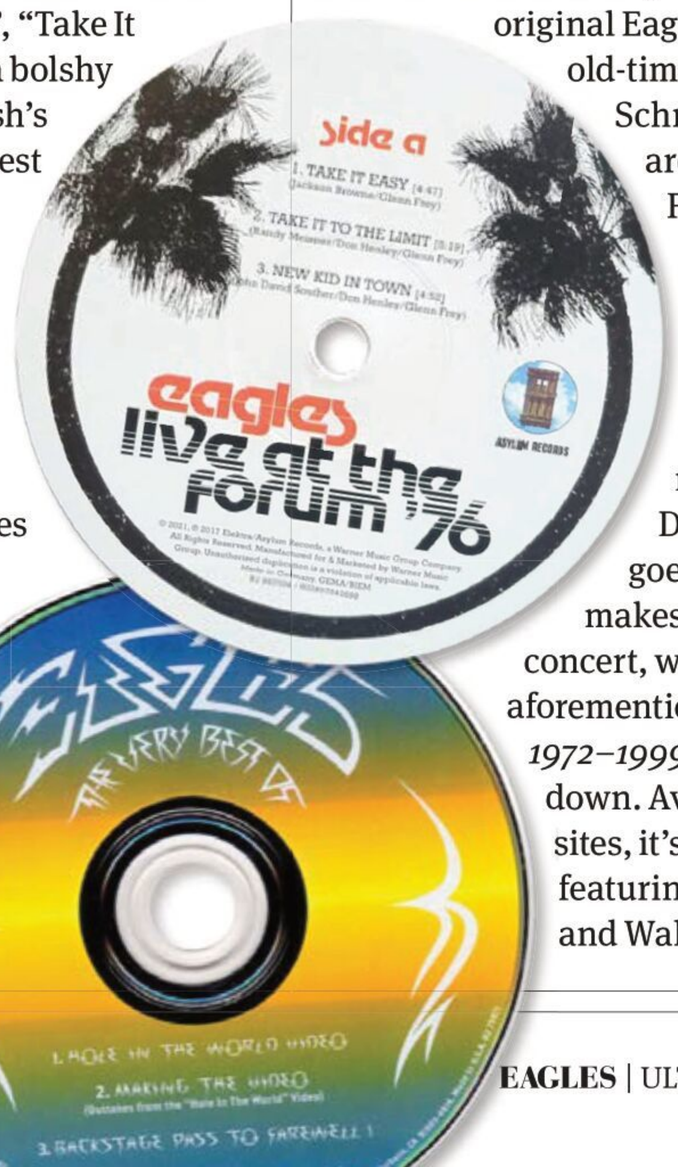


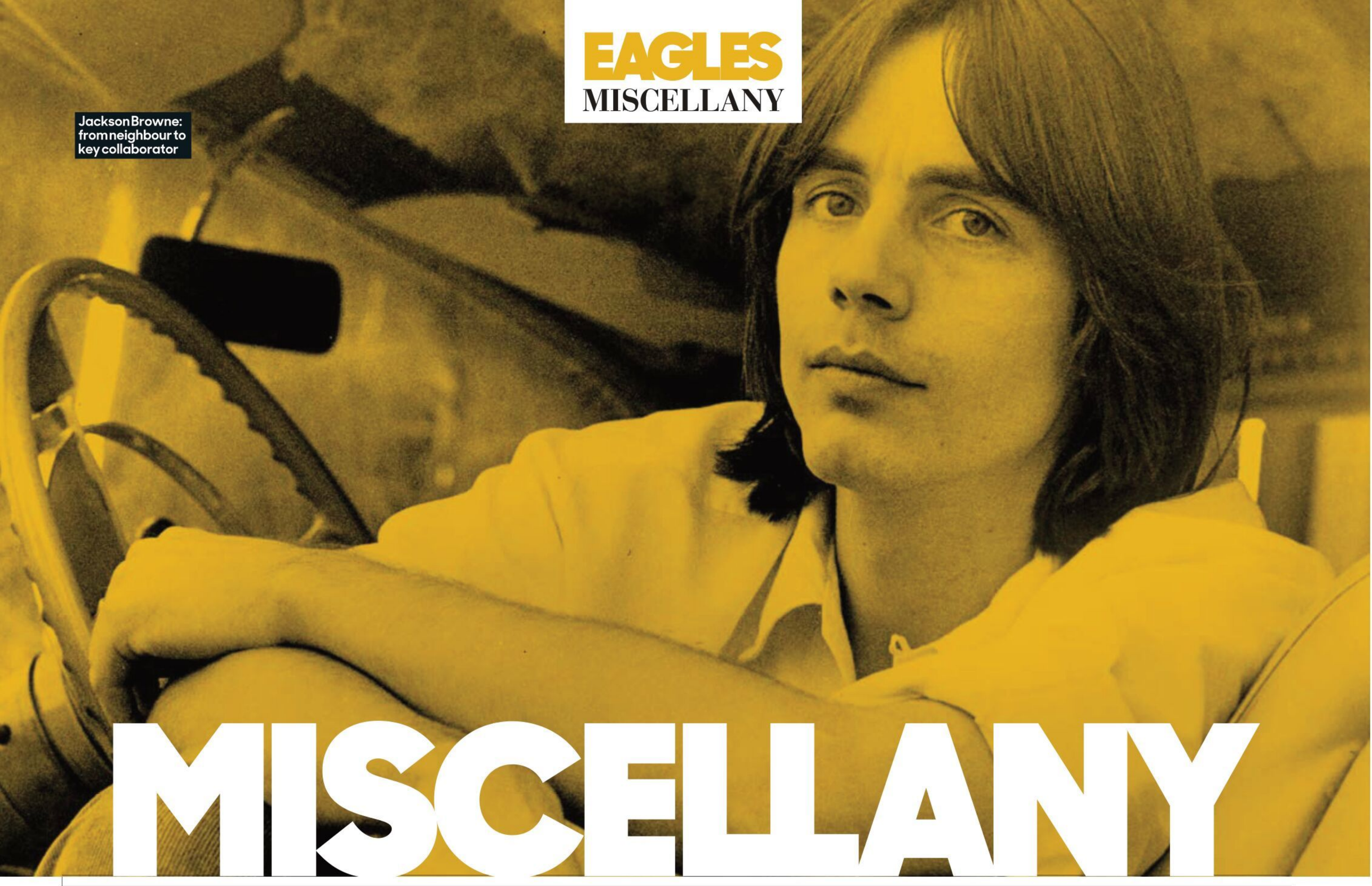


"Please Come Home For Christmas", plus a couple of the new tracks from *Hell Freezes Over* and, in "Hole In The World", a new Eagles track written about 9/11. It also has sleevenotes containing Henley and Frey's commentary about each track, assisted by Cameron Crowe. Thoughtfully compiled, packaged and sequenced, it's easily the best Eagles compilation on CD – although there is still a lot to be said for simply tracking down original versions of the two *Their Greatest Hits* albums and treating it as a double album.

While there have been several post-prime Eagles live albums, including *Eagles Live* and *Hell Freezes Over*, there are very few of when the band were in their pomp. That makes the recent release of **EAGLES LIVE AT THE FORUM 76** (RHINO, 2021) ★★★★★ a particular catch, featuring Frey, Henley, Felder, Walsh and Meisner playing home territory at pretty much the height of their powers. Exceptionally smooth, the album was previously only available as part of the 40th-anniversary release of *Hotel California* and features the band debuting a couple of tracks from that record, including "New Kid In Town" and then "Hotel California", which is received with an understandable mixture of awe and rapture by the entranced crowd. Around this sit exceptional, studio-quality versions of "One Of These Nights", "Already Gone", "Take It Easy", "Take It To The Limit", a bolshy "Witchy Woman" and Joe Walsh's "Funk #49". It's probably the best Eagles live album and as good in its way as *Their Greatest Hits* in that it presents many of their finest moments in an easily digestible form with almost no filler.

MORE recently, the Eagles returned to the Forum for a 2018 concert that was released as **LIVE FROM THE FORUM MMXVIII** (RHINO, 2020) ★★★. The band play their greatest hits plus a handful of solo cuts with varying degrees of enthusiasm but impressive endurance – this clocks in at almost two-and-a-half hours. This most recent version of the band has Henley as the only remaining original Eagle, alongside now old-timers Walsh and Timothy Schmit. The new additions are Vince Gill and Deacon Frey, the latter taking the place of his late father Glenn, to whom tribute is paid early in the show. Randy Meisner also gets a namecheck (though Don Felder's name goes unspoken). That makes the 1999 Millennium concert, which features on the aforementioned *Selected Works: 1972–1999* boxset, worth tracking down. Available on streaming sites, it's one of the last concerts featuring Frey, Henley, Felder and Walsh.





Jackson Browne: from neighbour to key collaborator

MISCELLANY

The co-writers, early bands and rarities. BY MARK BEAUMONT

THEIR GREATEST BITS

Who were the Eagles' writers/co-writers?

JD SOUTHER

11 SONGS: "DOOLIN-DALTON", "YOU NEVER CRY LIKE A LOVER", "BEST OF MY LOVE", "JAMES DEAN", "NEW KID IN TOWN", "VICTIM OF LOVE", HEARTACHE TONIGHT", "TEENAGE JAIL", "THE SAD CAFÉ", "HOW LONG", "LAST GOOD TIME IN TOWN"

Almost a member of the band from the off, Detroit-via-Texas country troubadour Souther had forged his connection with the band as Frey's roommate and collaborator in Longbranch Pennywhistle. He busied himself with the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band during the early days of the Eagles, but soon became their most regular co-writer, delivering them their breakthrough hit in "Best Of My Love" and several more besides. His solo career saw him go Top 10 in the US too, with "You're Only Lonely" in 1979, and he was inducted into the Songwriters Hall Of fame in 2013.

JACK TEMPCHIN

5 SONGS: "PEACEFUL EASY FEELING", "ALREADY GONE", "THE GIRL FROM YESTERDAY", "SOMEBODY", "IT'S YOUR WORLD NOW"

Having had "Peaceful Easy Feeling" plucked from his LA folk club sets by Frey and turned into a hit, Jack struck gold again by submitting "Already Gone" for *On The Border*. Returned as contributor to the *Hell Freezes Over* reunion and beyond.

STEUART SMITH

5 SONGS: "NO MORE WALKS IN THE WOOD", "WAITING IN THE WEEDS", "DO SOMETHING", "BUSINESS AS USUAL", "CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE"

Replacing Don Felder as touring Eagles guitarist in 2001, Smith would also contribute extensively to the songwriting on *Long Road Out Of Eden*.

JACKSON BROWNE

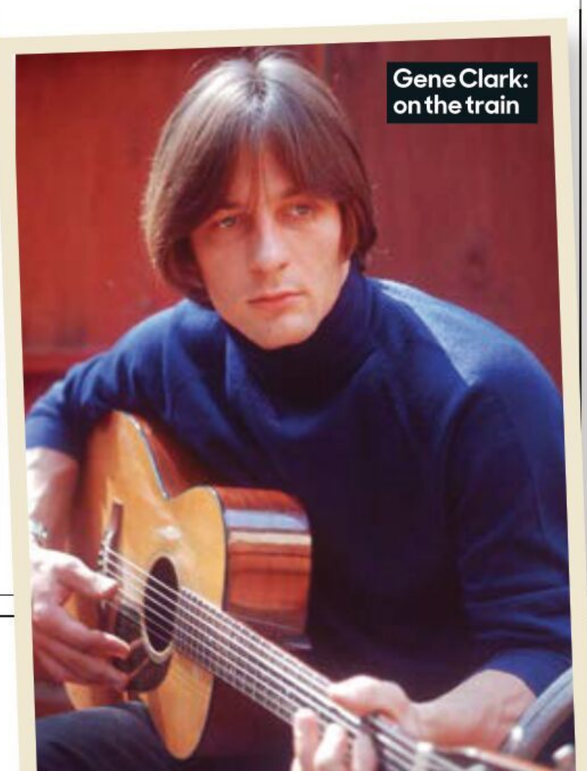
4 SONGS: "TAKE IT EASY", "NIGHTINGALE", "DOOLIN-DALTON", "JAMES DEAN"

Prior to his Eagles collaborations, the rising Canyon songwriter-for-hire had already penned notable tracks for the likes of Nico (his sometime girlfriend), The Lovin' Spoonful and The Byrds. He'd begun making waves with his 1972 debut album when he bagged his first major hit with his co-write on "Take It Easy" – a song Frey heard him struggling with when he and JD Souther lived in the apartment upstairs. He'd go on to be a key Eagles collaborator, helping inspire the concept for *Desperado*.

GENE CLARK

1 SONG: "TRAIN LEAVES HERE THIS MORNING"

The founding Byrd had worked with Bernie Leadon in the late-'60s outfit Dillard & Clark, and their co-write "Train Leaves Here This Morning" from the 1968 debut *The Fantastic Expedition Of Dillard & Clark* was revisited for the Eagles' debut.



Gene Clark: on the train

TOM NIXON

1 SONG: "OUT OF CONTROL"

A member of various Texan bands in the '60s, Nixon was a pal of Henley's from playing frat parties together, and w as recruited as roadie, later promoted to tour manager for the Eagles. Bagged a writing credit on "Out Of Control".

DAVID BLUE

1 SONG: "OUTLAW MAN"

A Dylan and Ochs contemporary from the Greenwich Village scene, Blue became best known for "Outlaw Man" when the Eagles commandeered it from his 1973 album *Nice Baby And The Angel*. Went on to become part of Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue in 1975 and to acting in movies directed by Wim Wenders and Neil Young. Died of a heart attack in 1982 while jogging, aged 41.

ROBB STRANDLUND

1 SONG: "ALREADY GONE"

Like Tempchin, Strandlund worked his way up through the San Diego and LA folk scenes, albeit interrupted by a tour of duty in Vietnam. The success of his co-write with Tempchin on "Already Gone" prompted him to form The Silverados, and he'd later serve briefly in The Flying Burrito

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY (2)

Brothers. On moving to Nashville, he penned a major hit for Vern Godsin in 1983 and made guest appearances at the Grand Ole Opry while playing with the likes of Bonnie Raitt and Mike Love.

PAUL CRAFT

1 SONG: "MIDNIGHT FLYER"

First recorded by the Osborne Brothers in 1972, "Midnight Flyer" was the handiwork of Memphis-born Craft, who'd made something of a name for himself when his song "Keep Me From Blowing Away" appeared on Linda Rondstadt's *Heart Like A Wheel* album and Ray Stevens released his novelty tune "It's Me Again, Margaret" in 1974. He would go on to be best known, perhaps, for writing Mark Chesnutt's "Brother Jukebox" single in 1977.

TOM WAITS

1 SONG: "OL' '55"

San Diegan folk-jazz cat Waits was no huge fan of his Asylum labelmates' cover of the only single from his 1973 debut album *Closing Time*, but it certainly drew attention to his early work as he made steps beyond his regular slots at the Troubadour in West Hollywood.

TOM LEADON

1 SONG: "HOLLYWOOD WALTZ"

Brother of Bernie, Tom's musical journey had begun in Tom Petty's earliest bands the Epics and Mudcrutch – Petty credited Tom with convincing him to move to LA – and also meandered through Linda Ronstadt's band, before the Eagles recorded his "Hollywood Waltz" on *One Of These Nights*.

PATTI DAVIS

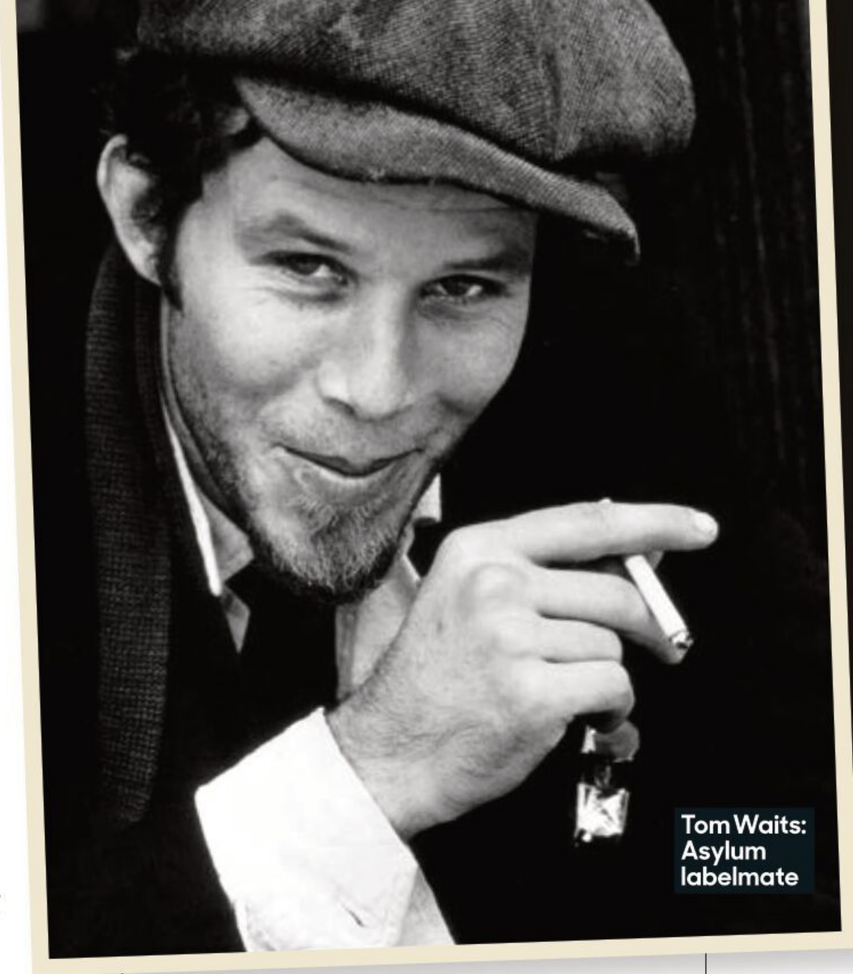
1 SONG: "I WISH YOU PEACE"

Third daughter of Ronald and Nancy Reagan, Davis was dating Leadon in 1975 and played a song of hers, "I Wish You Peace", around the house, which he helped her to finish. Though some of his bandmates objected to having the daughter of a conservative politician on *One Of These Nights*, Leadon talked them round.

JIM ED NORMAN

1 SONG: "WASTED TIME (REPRISE)"

Credited as the architect of 1970s West Coast country rock, Norman had played keyboards and guitar in Henley's North Texas State University band Felicity, which became Shiloh. He soon turned to producing and arranging, and his strings on "Wasted Time (Reprise)" earned him what must have been a welcome credit on *Hotel California*.



Tom Waits: Asylum labelmate

David Cohen, aka David Blue: felon traveller

JOE VITALE

1 SONG: "PRETTY MAIDS ALL IN A ROW"

A Kent State classmate and long-time collaborator of Walsh, ex-Barnstorm drummer and keyboardist Vitale joined the Eagles touring band in 1975, and his co-write with Walsh on "Pretty Maids All In A Row" gifted him his slice of *Hotel California*. He'd go on to play piano on *The Long Run* and join the Crosby, Stills & Nash band.

BARRY DE VORZON

1 SONG: "IN THE CITY"

Founder of Valiant Records and one-time frontman of Barry And The Tamerlanes, de Vorzon was a celebrated soundtrack composer when he co-wrote "In The City" with Walsh for the *Warriors* soundtrack, a song which also ended up on *The Long Run*. He'd also win a Grammy for 1976 hit "Nadia's Theme".

BOB SEGER

1 SONG: "HEARTACHE TONIGHT"

Having recently broken through with his Silver Bullet Band albums *Night Moves* and *Stranger In Town*, and en route to 75 million album sales of his own, the Detroit heartland rocker was well placed to receive a call from the Eagles while writing "Heartache Tonight" and bellow a *Billboard*-topping chorus down the phone at them.

STEVE YOUNG

1 SONG: "SEVEN BRIDGES ROAD"

Before the Eagles incorporated it into their shows, the likes of Joan Baez, Dolly Parton and Rita Coolidge had already covered "Seven Bridges Road" from the 1969 debut LP by Steve Young, an Americana pioneer, Van Dyke Parks collaborator and sometime member of psych-country band Stone Country.

CHARLES MOSE BROWN

1 SONG: "PLEASE COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS"

A "chilled" blues legend of the 1940s and '50s who would influence Ray Charles, Brown had a hit with "Please Come Home For Christmas" in 1960; it had sold a million long before Eagles recorded it as their 1978 holiday stop-gap.

GENE C REDD

1 SONG: "PLEASE COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS"

Brown has claimed he wrote "Please Come Home For Christmas" on his own but a credit also goes to Gene C Redd, bandleader, songwriter and A&R man at Brown's label King Records.

JIM CAPALDI

1 SONG: "LOVE WILL KEEP US ALIVE"

The Traffic co-founder had been part of Felder and Schmit's proposed early-'90s band Malibu Men's Choir, which failed to materialise. "Love Will Keep Us Alive" survived from the project, though, when Eagles recorded it for *Hell Freezes Over*.

PAUL CARRACK

2 SONGS: "LOVE WILL KEEP US ALIVE", "I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE"

Celebrated journeyman of Ace, Roxy Music, Squeeze, Roger Waters' band and Mike + The Mechanics among others, Carrack was also a part of Malibu Men's Choir, and later also slipped Schmit a tape of another of his songs, "I Don't Want To Hear Any More", which made its way onto *Long Road Out Of Eden*.

PETE VALE

1 SONG: "LOVE WILL KEEP US ALIVE"

Also a member of Malibu Men's Choir and songwriter for acts including Sheena Easton and Charles & Eddie.

STAN LYNCH

1 SONG: "LEARN TO BE STILL"

Having been the original drummer for Tom Petty's Heartbreakers for 18 years, Lynch had just left the band when he hooked up with Henley to help put together *Hell Freezes Over* as co-producer and contributor to "Learn To Be Still".

JOHN HOLLANDER

1 SONG: "NO MORE WALKS IN THE WOOD"

The lyrics of "No More Walks In The Wood" from *Long Road Out Of Eden* were based on "An Old Fashioned Song" by poet and literary critic Hollander, once mentored by Allen Ginsberg.

FRANKIE MILLER

1 SONG: "GUILTY OF THE CRIME"

Scottish pub rocker Miller, veteran of The Stoics and Jude and a solo hitmaker around his 1977 album *Full House*, had turned to movie and TV music and acting by the mid-'80s; "Guilty Of The Crime", covered on *Long Road Out Of Eden*, originated on *RoboCop: The Series*.

JERRY LYNN WILLIAMS

1 SONG: "GUILTY OF THE CRIME"

1970s singer turned songsmith for Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, Robert Plant and BB King, Williams co-wrote "Guilty Of The Crime" with Frankie Miller.

LARRY JOHN McNALLY

1 SONG: "I LOVE TO WATCH A WOMAN DANCE"

A 1980s solo singer from Maine, McNally wrote "The Motown Song" for Rod Stewart and "For My Wedding" for Henley before his 2001 track "I Love To Watch A Woman Dance" – about a night out clubbing in Amsterdam – was resurrected by the Eagles in 2007.

JOHN BRANNEN

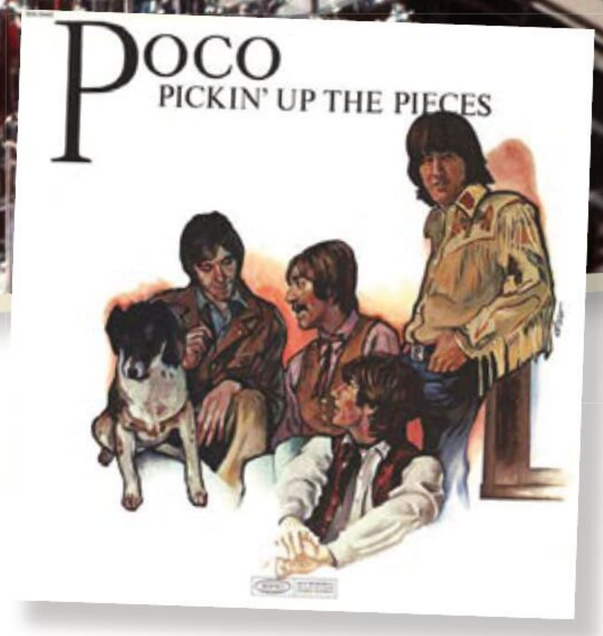
1 SONG: "SOMEBODY"

A Nashville Springsteen mentored by Walsh in the '80s, Brannen became a longtime collaborator of Tempchin; between them they penned "Somebody" for *Long Road Out Of Eden*.

Frankie Miller: copping to the crime

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY;HARVEY L SILVER/CORBIS/GETTY;GAB ARCHIVE/GETTY

Riding high: Joe Walsh with The James Gang on *Top Of The Pops*, 1971

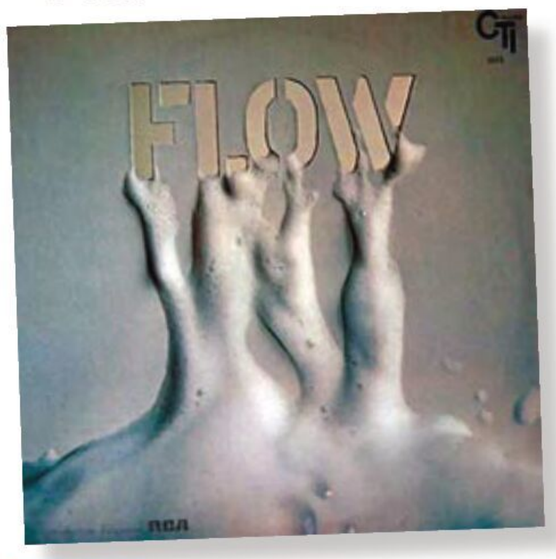


DESPERADOS!

Those pre-Eagles bands, in full…

THE CONTINENTALS/ MAUNDY QUINTET

WHO? Rock'n'roll combo launched by Don Felder at the age of 13 and featuring Stephen Stills in its early lineup. Stills was replaced by Felder's schoolmate Bernie Leadon before the band changed its name to the Maundy Quintet and received airplay in Florida with a slick, swinging 1967 single "2's Better Than 3" before breaking up.
HEAR: "2's better Than 3" appeared on *The Psychedelic States: Florida In The '60s*.



FLOW

WHO? Improvisational rock-fusion act that Felder joined in the wake of the Maundy Quintet split, moving to NYC and mastering improv guitar.
HEAR: 1970's *Flow* album, one of the first releases on Creed Taylor's CTI Records.

LONGBRANCH PENNYWHISTLE

WHO? The duo in which fresh-faced LA arrivals Frey and JD Souther learned the Californian country-rock ropes as the '70s dawned.
HEAR: The 1970 self-titled debut album also featured Ry Cooder, James Burton and Derek & The Dominos' Jim Gordon. It was rereleased in 2018.

SHILOH

WHO? Amos Records labelmates of Longbranch Pennywhistle, Shiloh were the culmination of much Texas scene toing and froing in the 1960s, involving early incarnations such as Four Speeds and The Felicity, both with Henley on vocals. They became Shiloh in 1969 for a country-rock single "Jennifer (O' My Lady)" (produced by Kenny Rogers) and then suffered the death of keyboardist Jerry Surratt in a motorcycle accident ahead of the release of 1970's self-titled debut album.
HEAR: The full Shiloh album, if you can't find it second-hand, is available on YouTube.

THE JAMES GANG

WHO? The Cleveland power-rock outfit that ushered a young Joe Walsh toward stardom. A review of their work can be found on page 112.
HEAR: Streaming services.

BARNSTORM

WHO? Following his departure from the James Gang, Walsh recorded two albums with his Barnstorm power trio, alongside Kenny Passarelli and his ex-Measles bandmate Joe Vitale. More details on page 112.
HEAR: Streaming services.

THE FLYING BURRITO BROTHERS

WHO? The ultimate revolving door band of country rock, Bernie Leadon provided spicy guitar sauce for the Burritos between 1969 and '71, stepping up as co-frontman in the wake of Gram Parsons' 1970 departure. His stint included the Altamont festival, and second album *Burrito Deluxe*.
HEAR: Streaming services.

POCO

WHO? As the dust settled around the demise of Buffalo Springfield, founding members Richie Furay and Jim Messina set about constructing a country-rock band to slip easily into. Randy Meisner won the audition for bassist, beating Greg Allman and Timothy B Schmit, but quit the band over rows with Furay during the mixing of their 1969 debut album *Pickin' Up The Pieces*. Schmit got the job instead, until he too heard the Eagles' call.
HEAR: Streaming services.

PURE PRAIRIE LEAGUE

WHO? Don Felder guested on their third album *Two Lane Highway*. But a firmer Eagles connection was made when Vince Gill – eventually to become Frey's replacement in the Eagles in 2017 – joined PPL after an exodus of members in 1977. Gill sang some of the band's final hits in "Let Me Love You Tonight" and "I'm Almost Ready" before quitting in 1982.
HEAR: Streaming services.

Let us play: Bernie Leadon, (top right) in The Flying Burrito Brothers

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY; JIM McCRARY/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

OL'55 (MILLION)

Top 10 references to "millions" in the EAGLES *Ultimate Music Guide*

"…The *Hell Freezes Over* album, video and tour netted the Eagles some 75 million dollars in pre-tax earnings…."
HELL FREEZES OVER

"When the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) announced America's best-selling records of all time in 1999, *Their Greatest Hits* was at No 1, with more than 27 million sales… In 2018, the collection once again the best-selling record in the US of all time, now with a certified 38 million sales – that's 38 times platinum. Current estimates have it with international sales of around 45 million sales…"
THEIR GREATEST HITS

"With between an estimated 32 and 41 million sales, it regularly ranks…"
HOTEL CALIFORNIA

"…eventually selling a handy 11 million records."
GREATEST HITS VOL 2

"One could understand why he felt miffed as *Hell Freezes Over* went on to shift more than nine million copies…"
HELL FREEZES OVER

"There were royalties aplenty on the album's path to worldwide sales in excess of eight million…"
LONG ROAD OUT OF EDEN

"Three Top 10 US singles, four million sales and three Grammy nominations"
ONE OF THESE NIGHTS

"…*Common Thread*… sold three million copies in six months and not only went to No 1 in the country chart but crossed over to No 3 on the mainstream *Billboard* pop chart…"
COMMON THREAD…

"The first LP to ever reach platinum status for one million sales, something that was introduced in 1976…"
THEIR GREATEST HITS

"…while the in-concert DVD racked up almost another million."
HELL FREEZES OVER

BUYIN' EYES

A brief guide to the Eagles on vinyl

When your greatest-hits album is the best selling of all time, and your most famous LP is certified platinum 26 times over, it's safe to say you're popular. And even in this era of hot-housed vinyl pricing, the second-hand supply of standard Eagles product is plentiful, and items remain affordable.

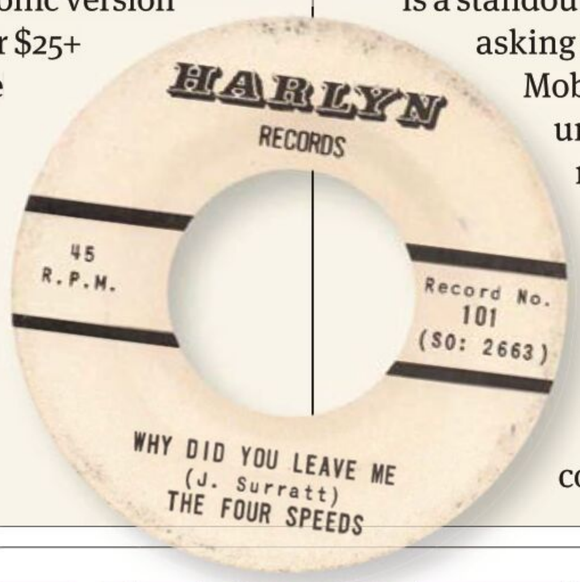
Go to any record fair, any weekend, and you'll likely trip over copies of *On The Border*. We reckon a tenner should still be plenty for a serviceable UK copy of each of the imperial phase LPs, with maybe £20+ for an excellent first press of *Hotel California* (with poster, of course). Mint means more, as always.

Rarer editions aren't huge money by today's standards. The UK green vinyl 1978 reissue of *Their Greatest Hits* is a remarkably reasonable £15–£20, while the Quadraphonic version of *One Of These Nights* sells for $25+ across the Atlantic. That same album on Quad 8-track cartridge – definitely an Eagles-appropriate format – seems priced around £30+. Lord, how great would that sound in your flat-bed Ford?

From those first Glyn Johns-produced salvos, the Eagles have always sounded great on vinyl. And 'audiophile' pressings are definitely a theme. The early-1980s Nimbus Supercut UK version of *Desperado* – exclusively available mail-order to readers of *Hi-Fi Today* magazine – is a standout, with one seller currently asking £500. In 2021, audiophile brand Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs, unleashed the coup de grâce: remastered, ultra-deluxe boxset versions of the first two albums on double 45rpm, 180g SuperVinyl, limited to 7,500 numbered copies. £150 is your mint guide price there.

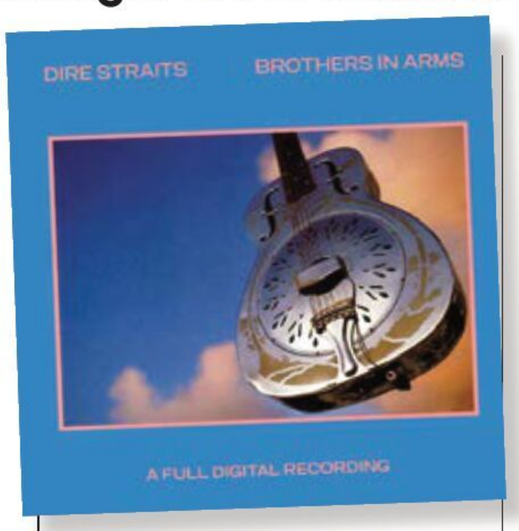
There are some interesting collectables in darker corners of the catalogues. Henley's pre-fame band Shiloh proffered dirty-denim country-rock, with production by Kenny Rogers, and original US pressings of their 1970 self-titled LP can make £80+. Felder's jazz-prog junket Flow released a solitary LP on Creed Taylor's CTI label in 1970, and these can be bagged for £25. 1968's *Feelin Glad* by Glad is pure, puppyish psych-pop, and features a young Timothy B Schmit. Nice original US pressings can be found for $50+.

Finally, two impossibly rare 7"s to keep an Eagle-eye out for. The Four Speeds' "Why Did You Leave Me"/"Bedrock" is a slice of surf-kissed garage rock, released in 1965 on Harlyn Records. Its $150+ price is elevated by the presence of a teenage Henley on drums. And another grail item features not one, but two future Eagles in Gainesville bros Leadon and Felder. Their high-school band The Continentals (which had once featured Stephen Stills), became The Maundy Quintet, and a single "2's Better Than 3"/"I'm Not Alone", was issued on Florida's obscure Paris Tower label in '67. If you ever find one, you're probably looking at $300–$400. ***MARK BENTLEY***



LIFE IN THE SOFT LANE

The Top 10 biggest-selling soft rock albums of all time...



THE EAGLES
Their Greatest Hits (1971–1975)
ASYLUM, 1976
Sales: 41–52 million
Compiling nine singles released between 1972 and 1975, plus "Desperado". A million sales were racked up in the first week.

THE EAGLES
Hotel California
ASYLUM, 1976
Sales: 31–42 million
A concept album from the dark side of the Californian dream. Captured in a sharp shift from country rock to gloss-slick drivetime rock'n'roll. People loved it.

FLEETWOOD MAC
Rumours
WARNER BROS, 1977
Sales: 28–40 million
The second volley from the Buckingham/Nicks-era Mac. It was the best-crafted soap opera soundtrack ever recorded.

DIRE STRAITS
Brothers In Arms
VERTIGO, 1985
Sales: 18–30 million
The Sultans Of Swing embrace '80s synthetic and hit AOR paydirt. "Money For Nothing" belied the noble, mournful depths of the album.

ELTON JOHN
Goodbye Yellow Brick Road
DJM, 1973
Sales: 9–30 million
The global cabal of Elton fans (2 per cent of records sold in the early '70s were Elton's) were waiting for a defining opus. This was it.

SIMON & GARFUNKEL
Bridge Over Troubled Water COLUMBIA, 1970
Sales: 25 million
The swansong to end them all. Simon & Garfunkel went out with a bombastic bang.

ELTON JOHN
Greatest Hits DJM, 1974
Sales: 24 million
A concise précis crushing "Your Song" up against "Benny And The Jets" and "Rocket Man..." was just what the early '70s ordered. And kept ordering.

BILLY JOEL
Greatest Hits FAMILY PRODUCTIONS/COLUMBIA, 1985
Sales: 23 million
Two-disc story-so-far

Gold disc woman: Stevie Nicks with Fleetwood Mac in Feb 1977

for a public playing catch-up. "Uptown Girl" woke a second generation to Joel's retro arts, and his *Greatest Hits* collection was perfectly timed to reveal more.

THE BEE GEES
Saturday Night Fever
RSO/POLYDOR/REPRISE, 1977
Sales: 22 million
Soundtrack to the John Travolta disco vehicle. The Bee Gees became the medallion in the chest hair of every wedding.

CAROLE KING
Tapestry ODE/A&M, 1971
Sales: 25 million
King's second solo album. Laurel Canyon soul rewoven for the Me generation, who saw themselves, and bought in.

Note: certified sales figures and estimated sales vary wildly for the largest releases; we've included the full range.

ED PEARLSTEIN/REDFERNS/GETTY

STOP ME

If You've Heard This One Before

DONHENLEY tells new kid in town BUD SCOPPA about "a theory we've developed, the theory of creative tension"…

AFTER I moved from New York to Los Angeles in late 1973, it took a while to get my bearings. New York was a vertical, densely populated grid, while LA was a low-lying, wide-open expanse that spread out in every direction. Eventually I realised that every resident's map of LA differed according to his or her regular movements. Mine was centred at the A&M lot at La Brea Sunset, where I worked, and stretched westward to the Troubadour, the Roxy and 9120 Sunset. The latter, a ramshackle series of connected mock-Tudor buildings, was then occupied by Geffen-Roberts Management. In those cosy, funky-chic confines, I had my initial encounters with Neil Young and Tom Petty, but the first interview I did there was with Glenn Frey and Don Henley.

At that moment, in 1975, the Eagles were right on the cusp of becoming the biggest band in America, propelled by *One of These Nights* and its three classic hits, the chart-topping title track, the Frey-sung "Lyin' Eyes" and "Take It To The Limit", bass player Randy Meisner's crowning achievement. The band would cement its lofty status the following year with *Hotel California*, but Henley and Frey could already sense the breakthrough coming. They were not short on self-assurance.

"Perspective's a real hard thing to keep in this business," Henley noted with characteristic sullen intensity. "Some days you just feel like, well, the hell with all those guys. I don't feel like doing this, I don't feel like doing that and they're screwing me over anyway. But that's what makes our group good. We are different. If everybody thought the same and played the same and everything was homogenous, it would all be dull and boring. The fact that we are different is the thing that makes us better. It's a theory we've developed, the theory of creative tension."

That tension was a fundamental part of the Eagles' makeup, a prickliness that was never far from the surface. "Hell yes, we fight," Frey readily acknowledged. "We fight with our manager; we fight with each other. Don and Bernie nearly had a fistfight the other day. We fight about everything: playing too loud, facial expressions, drinkin' too much, stayin' up too late, talking in a restaurant, not saying anything when you should've spoke up. The issue is not the important thing; the important thing is that it gets vented.

"Being in the Eagles is being married to four men. The music is our love life"

"When you're in a band, when you're working with a producer, with managers, with a whole lot of other people, it's all a romantic relationship," he continued. "When the band don't get off, the band fights. When a guy and his old lady don't make good love in the space of a certain time, there's gonna be a fight. It's gonna get released some way. It's creative tension. We've known each other now for a long time, but it's still a very frightening experience when you bare your soul to somebody. There's very few people on this planet you ever do that to, and we're doing that to each other constantly. Being in the Eagles is being married to four men. The music is our love life."

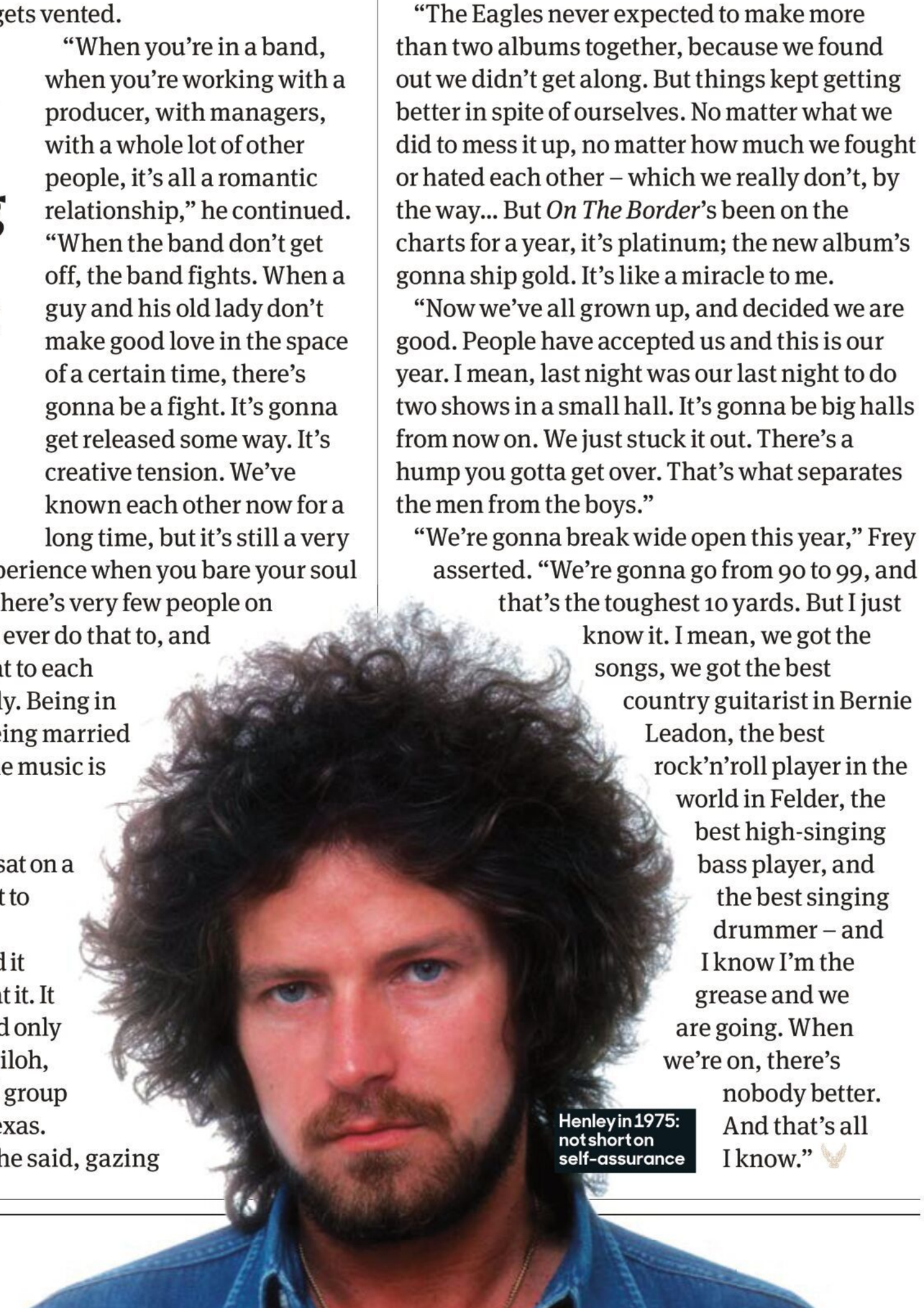
AN album sat on a table next to Henley's chair. He picked it up and looked at it. It was the first and only LP album by Shiloh, his high-school group from Linden, Texas.

"You know," he said, gazing at the cover photo, shot on the porch of his grandmother's cabin, "I've lost a lot of friends along the way. All these guys that I was in the band with, we grew up together. Grade school, junior high, high school. Now I don't ever see them; they hardly talk to me. Because I made it and they didn't. You have no idea the trauma and the guilt I went through. When I left this band after eight years, it was like getting a divorce. But I learned a long time ago, some people can come with you and some people you gotta leave behind.

"The Eagles never expected to make more than two albums together, because we found out we didn't get along. But things kept getting better in spite of ourselves. No matter what we did to mess it up, no matter how much we fought or hated each other – which we really don't, by the way... But *On The Border*'s been on the charts for a year, it's platinum; the new album's gonna ship gold. It's like a miracle to me.

"Now we've all grown up, and decided we are good. People have accepted us and this is our year. I mean, last night was our last night to do two shows in a small hall. It's gonna be big halls from now on. We just stuck it out. There's a hump you gotta get over. That's what separates the men from the boys."

"We're gonna break wide open this year," Frey asserted. "We're gonna go from 90 to 99, and that's the toughest 10 yards. But I just know it. I mean, we got the songs, we got the best country guitarist in Bernie Leadon, the best rock'n'roll player in the world in Felder, the best high-singing bass player, and the best singing drummer – and I know I'm the grease and we are going. When we're on, there's nobody better. And that's all I know."



Henley in 1975: not short on self-assurance

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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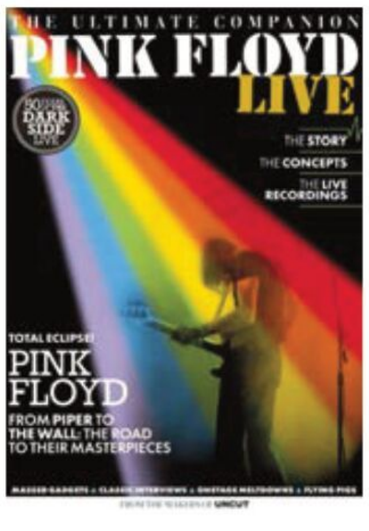
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